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MUSLIMS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AS A POTENTIAL (UNITED) POLITICAL FORCE

by

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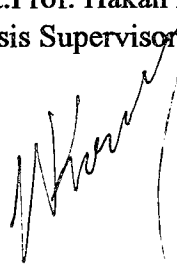
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ABSTRACT

After the collapse of the Soviet Union all the peoples of the former Soviet Union had experienced serious changes in the political, cultural, economic spheres, and simply in daily life. It is necessary to confess that the country is still living in a kind of ideological vacuum. It is early to say that the republics have been able to manage to shift from totalitarian regime to the democratic one, and the democracy has been firmly established in all republics. There is a search for the convenient ideology, that can combine democratic principles with the old state traditions, cultural and religious peculiarities.

Today the general important feature proper to the all Muslim republics is the rise of Islam. The revival of Islam started with the early years of *perestroika*, today reached significant dimension. The appeal to Islam is a characteristic of many political groups in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. A religious revival is a complex social phenomenon that can be studied from various angles. On one hand it is return to the traditional Muslim values through the practicing Islam, as an everyday fact, on the other hand it is rise of political Islam. Both aspects of the revival of Islam are present today in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. A rediscovery of Islamic roots is under way in all the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation.

The aim of this research is to highlight the recent political developments in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. In this work I tried to find an answer to such questions as: Can Islam serve as the ideological basis for the unification of the Muslim peoples of Russia, as it was at the beginning of this century? Do the Muslims of Russia have a sense of corporate identity, and, if so, to what extent can the Muslims of Russia be regarded as one entity?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of Muslims who consider themselves believers increased substantially. High interest towards the religion among the population lead to the significant increase in the number of the mosques, religious establishments, political parties along the religious lines. Today there are two officially registered Muslim parties of all-union character, operating in Russia.

This gradually accumulated but restrained political potential will sooner or later reveal itself forcing the Muslims of Russia to make step further. Today is the stage of regaining of lost values, the stage of common actions will come next. There can be little doubt that eventually the Muslim political organizations will convince the Muslim nations of advantages of cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

With some 22 million of Muslim population living within its borders, Russia is one of the world's major Muslim countries. Forming the large family of nationalities the Muslim peoples of Russia represent a very substantial part of the Islamic world .

The Muslim peoples of the Russian Federation came under Russian rule as a result of the expansionist policy of the Tsarist Empire. Today after ethnic Russians, Muslims constitute the second largest population group of the Russian Federation. There are seven Muslim regions in Russia; in the Volga-Ural region there are Tatarstan and Bashkortostan Republics, in the North Caucasus there are Republic of Dagestan, Ingush Republic, Karachay-Cherkes Republic, Kabartay-Balkar Republic and Adygey.¹

Analyzing the history of the Muslims of Russia, it is easy to notice the importance of religion in the historical development and the process of formation of the national identity among the Muslims of Russia. It was due to Islam that the Muslim peoples could preserve for centuries their cultural and ethnic individualism in the oppressing, Russian-dominated environment. In addition to the faithful attachment to their religion, the ability to survive as a distinct community in the

hostile environment makes the Muslims of Russia a unique and peculiar phenomenon.

Until recently, the historians and the scholars of Islam focused their studies on the Muslim world outside the Russian Federation. Though the history of the Muslim peoples of the Russian Federation represents a particular interest for a wide range of scholars, the history of the Muslim political associations has been the subject of very few scholarly studies in the West and even in Russia itself.

A close and detailed study of the Muslims of Russia and political associations they formed has become necessary for the proper understanding of the political developments that are currently taking place in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation.

Taking into account the shortage of inquiries concerning the present political life of the Muslims of the Russian Federation, I saw the necessity to highlight the recent political dynamics that have occurred in the Muslim communities of the Russian Federation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The aim of this research is to produce a comprehensive analysis of the political potential of the Muslims of Russia. More precisely, this study analyzes the potential of the Muslims of Russia to represent a united political force, as it was before the Revolution.

In this work I tried to find an answer to such questions as: do the Muslims of Russia have a sense of corporate identity, and, if so, to what extent can the Muslims of Russia be regarded as one entity? Can Islam serve as the ideological basis for the unification of the Muslim peoples of Russia, as it was at the beginning of this century?

Although this research is devoted to the study of the Muslim community of Russia, this paper does not deal either with dogma or philosophy of Islam. But, since the title of the research is “The Muslims Political Movements of Russia as a Potential Political Force”, the term *Muslim*, used in the context of this paper, requires some comments. One of the most complicated problem that the researcher faces during the studying of the Muslim population of Russia, is the concept and the usage of the word *Muslim* in Russia.

Who are the Muslims of Russia? Is it just a religious community of believers without any political or ethnic peculiarities, or is it a mosaic of nationalities and ethnic minorities who have serious political aspirations and demands, but for their common attachment to the religion and culture of Islam, they remain first of all Muslim? In many cases the word *Muslim* is used in Russia as an identification, not an affirmation of religious beliefs, in some cases it is just the opposite. There are also Muslims “by nationality”, or “by heart” like the Kazan Tatars or Chechens. In other words, membership of a certain nationality means automatically that a person must worship Islam. Despite this there are fierce atheists and convicted communists among the Kazan Tatars and other Muslim nations, peoples who are completely indifferent to the practice of religion, at the same time there are some peoples among the Russians or other nationalities who became Muslim, and diligently observe all the duties of Islam.

In addition to the vast Muslim settlements in Siberia, Far East and other provinces, there are large Muslim communities in Moscow, St.Petersburg and many other purely “Russian” cities and provinces. The Muslims among the groups of the

consistent non-Russian population of Moscow stay on the second place after the Ukrainians, and on the third place in St.Petersburg after the Ukrainians and Jews.² In short, the boundary between what is considered to be Muslim or non-Muslim is not fixed by the Islam but rather by Muslims themselves. To reflect the true nature of the Muslim community of Russia, the word *Muslim* in this research is used as a common name for all the distinct non-Russian national minorities of Russia who belong to the Islamic culture. So, to avoid misperceptions, the meaning of *Muslim* must be viewed within this context.

The study is divided into four parts. The first chapter deals with the history of the pre-revolutionary Muslim political movements. I used pre-revolutionary political experience of the Muslims of Russia as a case to demonstrate the process of the formation of Islamic political consciousness among the Muslim peoples of Russia. The creation of the All-Russian-Muslim movements such as the “Union of Muslims” or *Ittifaq-ı-Müslimin* to defend political rights of the Muslim subjects of the empire, was one of the most significant moments in the history of the Muslim peoples of Russia. The present political situation in the Muslim republics of Russia, is a logical consequence of the political past, memories of which still alive in the minds of the Muslim peoples.

This study analyzes the political potential of the Muslims of Russia. Therefore I found it necessary to study in detail not only the common features, consistent parts of this potential, but also the obstructive factors that weaken the political potential of the Muslims of Russia. Among the obstacles reducing the possibility of common action is the division of the Muslim nations into the administrative units. The second

chapter of the research deals with these issues. All the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation in their present form are the products of the Soviet period. The administrative frontiers of the Muslim republics were drawn in such a manner as to create a border dispute and confrontation among the neighboring Muslim republics. This factor obstructs the peaceful collaboration among the various Muslim republics. The political and administrative transformations that took place in the Muslim regions during the Soviet rule left a profound, if not dramatic, impact on national and religious identity of the Muslim nations of Russia. Another negative phenomenon inherent in all the Muslim republics is the communist *nomenclatura*. The common feature of these soviet-style leaders is the pathological fear of Moscow. Putting the interests of the federal authorities before the interests of their own republics, the national communists in the Muslim republics stay very aloof and apathetic to the demands of their peoples. I argue in this chapter that the social, political, cultural changes that the Muslim peoples have undergone in the past seventy years, tremendously increased the gap between the Muslim nations, once united and kindred.

However it would be wrong to assume that the situation is desperate. There is one factor that can overpower all these impeding post-communist realities, it is a general revival of Islam. Part three investigates the process of Islamic and national revival at the local level, within the context of regional and national movements. I tried to estimate the role and place of Islam in the political aspirations of these republics by examining different political movements operating in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. The strength of the Islamic factor can be

measured through the political demands of the various popular movements and parties operating in the ethnic republics.

The first attempt to represent the interests of the Muslims of the Russian Federation in the all-union scale, has been made with the formation of some union-based Muslim political parties. Keeping in mind the transnational character of Islam, these parties are seeking popular support and have serious political ambitions, one of which is the creation of the Muslim Fraction in the State Duma. The fact that the Muslims of Russia made an effort to unite, is an indicator of possible political developments within the Muslim community of Russia. Part four of the research represents the analysis of these political movements.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the present political situation in the Muslim regions of Russia and to examine the potential of these separated Muslim communities to unite under the single ideology. In short, this study addresses several issues: first, the current political problems and atmosphere in the Muslim republics; secondly, the level and magnitude of religious revival in the Muslim republics; thirdly, the scope of activities of the Muslim parties operating on the all-Russian scale, and the review of the present political potential of the Muslims of Russia.

Though the divided Muslim peoples of Russia have not shown yet that they are willing to unite to struggle for a common goal, I personally believe that the present evolution will lead to the further reawakening of Islamic consciousness.

CHAPTER I

MUSLIMS AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA

In order to understand the present situation in the Muslim community of Russia, it is necessary to look back at its history. Because many problems that agitate the Muslims of Russia today are similar to those that inspired them to unite at the beginning of this century.

The history of the Muslim political movement has its roots in the 19th century, when a new group - *intelligentsia* emerged among the Muslim societies of Russia. But it would be wrong to assume, that throughout their history the Muslims of Russia were subjects of the Russian state without any real popular demands. From the very beginning the Muslim subjects of Russia, especially Tatars, have made numerous attempts to improve their conditions of life, openly confess religion, and raise their political and legal status. For a long time these seeds of political liberalism did not find fertile ground to provide visible results, and only by the 19th century could the idea of political action be realized in practice.

The nineteenth century, characterized by its political radicalism, technological boom, progressive thought and rise of the nationalism, was a turning point in the history of Russia. These favorable circumstances also served the interests of the

Muslims: information about the changing world and events reaching the Muslim communities, facilitated the formation of a new Islamic consciousness. For the first time, after the centuries of passive acquiescence to Russian domination Muslims of Russia had a chance to voice their aspirations openly. All the positive changes that occurred in the nineteenth century in the Muslim community : technological advances, the rise of the press, growth of literacy, the emergence of new social groups such as *intelligentsia*, educated intellectuals, and the merchants, opened the doors to innovative thinking and paved the way for the future cultural, religious and educational reformism.

Gradually, maturing politically and culturally in the the nineteenth century, Muslims, proved themselves quite capable of defending their own national and religious interests in the twentieth century.

1.1. 19th Century Reformism

In the 19th century the Muslims of Russia were at different stages of political development, religious affiliation and social structure. Freedom-loving North Caucasian Muslims, lately invaded to the Russian Empire, fiercely resisted the Russian invasion, Muslims of Central Asia, nomadic in genesis, somnolently roamed throughout the vast expanses of Asian steppes, (time by time engaged in tribal and clan's affairs,) Azerbaijanis became involved in industrial development, and the Kazan Tatars, most westernized and developed Muslim nation of Russia, were preoccupied with cultural and educational reforms.

Despite all these differences, Muslims of Russia had one thing in common: they were deeply conscious of their religious affiliation, which later stimulated the growing awareness of religious unity among them.

The first innovations that appear in the Muslim community of Russia in the 19th century were mostly on the religious and cultural platform. The reformist movement was started by the Kazan Tatars. Due to the substantial level of cultural, social and economic development, the Tatars became the political and cultural leaders of the Muslims of Russia and pioneers of the Muslim reformist movement in the 19th century.

The Muslim reformism is indebted to the intellectual climate of Kazan. Due to its intensive intellectual life, the city of Kazan became one of the prominent cultural and political centers of the Muslim world. In the 19th century, the Kazan Tatars were among the most advanced members of Islamic community in the field of education and Islamic theology. Tatar religious thinkers such as Ebu Nasır el-Kürsevi (1771-1812) and Şehabettin Mercani (1818-1889) made serious attempts to clear Islam of the religious dogmas that dominated religious thinking at that time. Thus Mercani believed that Islam religion could harmonize perfectly with the modern science. Another prominent Muslim thinker was Kayyum Nasiri (1824-1902). Being a brilliant linguist and philologist, he wrote numerous books on ethnography, geography, physics and other subjects, enlightening and inspiring in this way his Muslim contemporaries. With four thousand published scholastic works, Nasiri was the most active Muslim thinker and writer of his time.³ The number of scholastic books written by the Tatar reformers reflected the intellectual level of the Tatar society.

The Tatars had obtained their first license to print Muslim religious books in Russia after the enactment of liberal legislation by Catherine II, and by 1802 some 14 300 copies of such books, including the Koran, had been printed. Fifty years later, during the period 1853-1859, Kazan University alone published 326 700 copies of Koran and other books in Tatar, and by the decade 1854-1864 the number of books published by Tatars exceeded one million.⁴

The books printed in Kazan were circulated not only in the Muslim regions of Russia but also were exported abroad, to Turkistan, Hiva, Buhara and even India.⁵ Success in the cultural and scholastic spheres achieved by the Tatars in the first half of the 19th century, worried Orthodox missionaries.

In the second half of the 19th century the Russian government launched another rampant campaign of Russification and Christianization. During the 19th century Russification became official dynastic policy. The new school system designed by the Russian educator Ilminsky attempted to provide education in Russian. The final aim of this educational reform was the rapprochement (*sblizheniye*) between the Russians and Tatars, which would lead to the assimilation of the Tatars. The response of the Tatar intellectuals to the Tsarist government's attempt to convert them to Christianity through the Russian language was sophisticated and intelligent. This response was the modernist *Jadid* (reformist) movement..

By the end of the 19th century Tatar scholars and intellectuals became aware that the old-style Tatar educational system based on religious teaching could not keep pace with the rapidly changing environment. The traditional educational system based on memorizing religious subjects. In these Islamic establishments neither secular subjects nor Russian language were taught. With the main goal to prepare religious figures, this educational system could not answer the real needs of the contemporary society. There was a need for a secular Tatar school. The progressive Tatar

intellectuals understood that in order to survive they had to regain intellectual and economic equality with the Russians preserving Islam as the basis of Tatar society , and only proper educational reform could speed up the process of transformation of a traditional society into the modern one. Otherwise, without the essential prerequisites of the contemporary modern society, the weak and backward Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire would be doomed. The Tatar concern with secular education and promotion of science was a good indicator of their willingness to take part in all spheres of life within the Russian state.

The Muslims of Crimea and the Volga-Ural region took initiative and provided leadership for the cultural and intellectual revival of the Muslims within Russia. The first man who introduced reforms to the Muslim community of Russia was a Crimean Tatar intellectual named Ismail Bey Gaspiralı. Gaspiralı (1851-1914) was one of the most outstanding figures in the political history of the Turko-Muslim peoples of Russia. Well-educated and European-minded, Gaspiralı firmly believed that the future development of the Muslim nations depends on the quality of educational standards. As a start, Gaspiralı offered a new method of instructions to the traditional *mektebs* and *medreses* in Russia. He introduced mathematics, history, and geography to the curriculum of these schools, though without challenging the study of Koran as fundamental for the Muslims. With the improvement of the quality of education, the number of *new method* schools rapidly increased. By the end of the 19th century in the Kazan guberniya there were 1.21 schools and 55 students per thousand Tatars, for every thousand Russians this proportion was 0.88 schools and 40 students.⁶

As a result of the development of the Tatar schools, there were 25 000 of them by 1912, and the rate of literacy among the Tatars before the revolution was only slightly less than among the Russians.⁷

This new system of education with a wide range of secular subjects, challenged the obsolete, traditional, narrow way of acquiring knowledge, widening the outlook of the pupils and bringing to them a new understanding of reality. Later these new method reforms, *Usul-u-jadid* turned to the general movement of intellectual awakening among the Muslims of Russia. *Usul-u-jadid* became the slogan of progressive Tatar intellectuals, and they themselves began to be called *Jadids*.

Gaspıralı's activities were not limited just by educational reforms. He continually visited other Muslim regions of Russia, enlightening and inspiring his coreligionists. *Tercüman* the first newspaper, published in Turkish language and intended to embrace all of the Muslim peoples in Russia, was also brought about by Gaspıralı. Besides the propaganda activities, *Tercüman* interpreted on its pages all developments of the Muslim community in Russia and in the Muslim world, and soon become the most influential newspaper among the Muslims of Russia.

By the end of the nineteenth century, at least, it had subscribers and an audience in virtually every corner of the Turkic world, and even beyond. To this day, no other periodical has achieved such an "all-Turkic" interest and distribution in any way comparable to *Tercüman*.⁸

With genuine devotion Gaspıralı served the cause of Muslim cultural and religious unity. He understood that only unity and solidarity could help the Muslims of Russia to preserve their Turkic identity and Muslim faith. Gaspıralı's reforms were dedicated to the creation of the national unity of the Muslim Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire on the basis of common ethno-religious and linguistic consciousness. The ideology of Gaspıralı can be summed up in his famous phrase "unity of

language, thought, and action.”⁹ The general political program of Gaspralı concentrated upon such issues as: development of national schools, through educational reforms, creation of special foundations to provide financial assistance to the educational centers, modernization of the traditional Muslim way of life, and emancipation of Muslim women.¹⁰

At the end of the 19th century Gaspralı became the most popular and influential Turkish leader in Russia. Gaspralı was a shrewd and pragmatic reformist, he never advocated measures that could lead to a confrontation between the Russian state and Muslim minorities. He aimed to transform the Muslim Turks living in Russian Empire into a modern nation with all its attributes. This transformation could only be achieved through socio-cultural reforms, and the starting point of these reforms had to be the establishment of a common literary language. (The common language for the Muslims of Russia could be Turkic language). But due to the difference in dialects, the attempts to create one common Turkic literary language was unsuccessful.

1.2. The Union of Muslims of Russia, *Ittifaq-i-Muslimin*

Eventually, by the end of the 19th century, politically oriented circles appeared in many Muslim areas. Those Muslim intellectuals who acquired liberal education and acquainted themselves with political and intellectual currents, naturally were involved into the realm of politics. Many *Jadids* became associated with the Russian liberal movement and progressive circles. On the eve of the Revolution of 1905, the general mood of the Muslims of Russia seriously reflected all

the drama of the political situation in the country. At the same time, separated from each other and disoriented by the surrounding chaos, the Muslims did not have any concrete plan of political action in the face of impending events. In spite the reformist movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries religious conservatism dominated in many Muslim regions, and many Muslims preferred to refrain from the manifestation of political affiliation and participation in any liberal movement. Another extreme was the inclination of some Muslim activists to join socialist revolutionary parties elevating class struggle above national issues. In both cases, historical circumstances inevitably forced Muslims together with other peoples in Russia to take further steps.

It was during this period that serious steps toward the unity of the Turko-Muslims of the Russian Empire on a political platform was taken, and, to a certain extent, such a unity was realized. In spite of interruptions and important exceptions, a political movement encompassing all the Turks of the Empire came into being.¹¹

One by one Muslim delegations from various Muslim regions arrived to St. Petersburg presenting their petitions to the government officials. The basic need of the Muslim peoples living in Russia were more or less similar, therefore the question of common action was put on the agenda. It is natural that during this reactionary and turbulent period, the Muslims of Russia urgently felt the need of political unification. Again, the Tatars were in the forefront of the liberal movement providing ideas and leadership for other Muslim nations of Russia. Abdürreshid Ibrahimov, former émigré journalist, formed in St. Petersburg a Muslim political group where he laid the foundation of the future all-Russian Muslim movements. Many wealthy Muslim businessmen such as Huseyinov, Tagiev lent their full financial support to the common Muslim cause. After several preliminary meetings in Kazan and Ufa, it was decided to prepare all necessary arrangements for the forthcoming grand meeting of

all the Muslims of Russia. According to the arrangements the All-Russian Muslim Congress would be held in August in Nizhniy Novgorod.

Although organizers could not obtain the official permission to convene a meeting, the first congress of all-Russian Muslims was held on 28 August 1905 in Nizhniy Novgorod during its annual fair.¹² Due to the refusal of the government officials to get permission, the steamboat *Gustav Struve* was rented and under the pretext of pleasure excursion the first All-Russian Muslims congress was realized. Nearly one hundred and forty Tatar and Azerbaijani delegates participated in the congress. The congress confirmed the principal aim of its participants, that is the creation of a political union (*Ittifaq*) of all the Muslims of Russia. The following resolutions made in the congress, reflected the aspirations and basic demands of the Muslim delegates:

1. Unification of Muslim citizens of Russia for the purpose of carrying out political, economic, and social reforms.
2. Establishment of constitutional monarchy, based on proportional representation of nationalities.
3. Legal equality of the Muslim and Russian populations.
4. Freedom of press, convention, and religion.
5. Establishment of regional councils (*mahalli meclis*) to act on behalf of the regular Muslim congresses.¹³

Two months later, following the *October Manifesto*, the political climate in Russia changed favorably, and the Muslims, along with other parties could carry on their activities openly on a legal basis. The liberties brought about by the famous

October Manifesto of 1905, provided the Muslims of Russia appropriate ground for the establishment of political organizations and spreading their activities.

Immediately, on January 1906, the second All-Russian Muslim Congress was held in St.Petersburg. In this congress the participants voted unanimously for the establishment of the official Union of the Muslims of Russia, *Ittifaq-i-Muslimin* , or simply *Ittifaq*, and every delegate swore on the Koran to work on behalf of the Union. Another issue on the agenda of the Congress was a selection of the Russian party to cooperate with in the elections. The Congress resolved to cooperate with the Russian Kadets (Constitutional Democrats) in the elections to the first Russian Parliament, Duma.¹⁴

As a result of propaganda activities and skillful cooperation with the Kadets, the Muslims gained 25 seats in the elections to the First Duma. The Muslim representatives from the Crimea, Kazan, Caucasus, Turkestan and Kazak lands were sent to the first Russian highest legislative organ.¹⁵

The first Russian representative organ, Duma was opened on May 1906. Unfortunately, the parliamentary experience of the Muslim deputies did not last for a long. Promising so much, and arousing great hopes, the First Duma was short-lived, and on July 1906 it was dissolved. Nevertheless, such a revolutionary innovation, gave incredible motivation to the Muslim peoples and social and political activities in the Muslim areas increased.

On August 16-21, 1906 the third and the most notable Muslim Congress was held in Nizhniy Novgorod. It was a very representative forum. With some 800 delegates from all the Muslim regions of the Russian Empire, it was the largest

Muslim Congress ever held.¹⁶ Being the first Muslim Congress officially authorized by the government, it was observed by the Russian and Turkish press. The main issue on the agenda of the Congress was the formation of the political party out of the *Muslim Union*. The *Muslim Union* was an alliance, not a political party, therefore, to act properly on the Russian political scene, there was a need for an official legal political party. Despite some disagreements, about the ideology and nature of the party, the Congress adopted a decision to create political party based on national and religious principles. The basic nature of the party is well reflected in the Y.Akçura's speech responding to the Socialist Revolutionaries objections: "There should be unions based on principles of nationality and ethnic origin; despite economic differences, it is always possible to unite and organize the most powerful party on principles of nationalism and religion".¹⁷ The party program demanded legal equality of the Muslims with the Russians, cultural autonomy, parity of all religions, reorganization of education for the Muslims, constitutional arrangements.¹⁸ Articles concerning economic and agrarian issues, were in line with the Kadets economic theories. In general, the political program of the *Ittifaq*, consisting of seventy-two articles, was very close to the Kadets political platform.

Another important issue discussed and adopted on the Congress was the educational program. The program demanded the uniformity of education throughout the Muslim regions on the basis of the "New Method" reforms. According to the program, in the elementary school the language of instruction should be the local dialect, and later on the high school level, one common Turkish language, i.e. Ottoman Turkish must be introduced.¹⁹

Despite the moderation of the political program, it was evident that the ultimate political goal of the Muslims of Russia was the elimination of imperial influence and Russian domination. The Muslims, led by the Tatars, were definitely determined to use this historical opportunity to make up for lost time and gain long-awaited momentum.

Again the successful collaboration with the Kadets (the only party that accepted the cultural and national program of the Muslims) resulted in an increase in the number of seats gained in the elections to the Second Duma. The Muslims sent 39 representatives to the Second Duma.²⁰ The Second Duma, unlike the first one, was dominated by the leftist parties. But the Muslim deputies together with the Kadets also showed themselves as active supporters of the governmental reforms.

After the initial opening of the Second Duma, Azerbaijani deputy Ali Merdan Topçubaşı appealed to the Muslim deputies with the idea to form a separate Muslim fraction within the Duma.²¹ The majority of the deputies responded to this call, and only six deputies belonging to the socialist group formed their own bloc. The Muslim deputies in the Second Duma paid special attention to the problem of land reforms. The point of disagreement between two Muslim groups was the question of land reform. The socialist Muslim deputies advocated free distribution of the land to the peasants, whereas the *Muslim Fraction* along with the Kadets supported long-term land tenure.

Another important question that disturbed the Muslims in the Second Duma was Russia's colonization policy. The deputies from Turkestan were very concerned

about the incidence and scope of settlements of Russian population in the Muslim regions.

Unfortunately, the Second Duma repeated the fate of the former one. After several months it was dissolved for being irreconcilable to government policy. Again, to the misfortune of the Muslim deputies, the life of the Duma had been too short to make any serious political accomplishments.

But outside the Duma, the scope of reforms, accompanied by the outburst of national press and schools, reached vigorous dimensions and touched even the remote places inhabited by Muslims. Although Muslim reformists refrained from the open national and political agitation, all these rapid developments showed that the Muslims had become a serious political force, that alarmed the Russian officials. Imperial Russia never tolerated any open political activity directed at weakening its supranational structure.

To avoid further incidents compromising governmental policies, the electoral law was reshaped. This new electoral system deprived the Central Asian region of the electoral right and severely restricted the number of representatives from other Muslim regions. As a result, only 10 Muslim deputies were represented in the Third Duma and, as it was in the Second Duma, the Muslims formed their own parliamentary fraction. The Third Duma was more conservative and nationalistic in its composition. Under these conditions it was very difficult for the Muslim deputies to realize their progressive ideas. The Kadets, political partners of the Muslims from the previous assemblies, also did not have enough seats to form a powerful bloc.

Despite these obstacles, the Muslim fraction and individual Muslim deputies of the Third Duma acted cohesively for the common cause of the Muslims of Russia. The main issues raised by the Muslim deputies during the sessions of the Third Duma were the legal equality of the Muslims subjects of the Empire, underrepresentation of Muslims in the legislative organs, *vakıf* question, the right of the Muslims to educate their children in the national schools, and problems with Christianization. The presence of strong Russian nationalist elements and Orthodox clergy in the Third Duma lead to new attempts to russify non-Russian subjects of the empire. In response, the Muslim deputies challenged to the flagrant attacks of the ultra-right Russian deputies and expressed their protest in series of impressive speeches, but it was the only thing they could do.²² Being a weak minority they were alienated by the hostile and aggressive atmosphere of the Third Duma, and they could not possibly have achieved any considerable result.

The Muslim Fraction of the Fourth Duma was consisted of only six deputies; five of them from the Volga-Ural region. The political composition of the Fourth Duma was even more unpromising than the previous one, so all the hopes connected with the legal achievements on behalf of the Muslims came to the end. The desperate fate of the Muslim fraction in the Duma showed that open manifestations of the political aspirations of the Muslims were doomed to failure.

In summary; although the *October Manifesto* brought liberal reforms and the Muslims were given an opportunity to stand up for their rights in political platform, in reality things seemed much more difficult. Gradually, this euphoria abated and, after the dissolution of two Dumas, the reactionary regime again resumed repressive

measures throughout the Russian empire. During this period many Muslim progressive thinkers and reformist were forced to leave the country and carry on their work abroad. During the last years of the Tsarist regime the Muslims of Russia found themselves in the turbulent maelstrom of events. Repression, violence, strikes, demonstrations; revolutionary unrest reached unprecedented dimensions keeping the exhausted country in the constant feverish agony. The absolute monarchy in Russia entered into its final stage.

The Muslims of the Russian empire did not remain aloof from the revolutionary activities of their Russian counterparts. As it was mentioned earlier some of the Muslim reformists, strongly inspired and influenced by the socialist doctrines, joined the socialist camp. Many Muslims enthusiastically participated in revolutionary actions believing that only common solidarity of all oppressed peoples of the empire could overthrow the tyranny of Tsarism. The enlargement of the radical left, particularly noticeable among the Tatars, Bashkirs and Azerbaijanis, later led to their dissent from the traditional nationalist reformers.

Nevertheless, regardless of their ideological affiliations, the Muslims of Russia welcomed the fall of the monarchy. Everybody believed that a new era of democratic reconstruction of Russian Empire had begun, promising a happy future for all the peoples of Russia. As though confirming these expectations the provisional government introduced some significant liberal legislation on ethnic minorities; one of them was a decree by which all peoples of Russia were given an equal status.²³

It is an incontestable fact, that despite all of their political differences Muslims of Russia continued to be united by the religion and culture of Islam. That

is why, immediately after the February Revolution, the Muslims were among the first to react, and the question of Islamic unity was again raised in the post-Revolutionary agenda. This time the Muslim leaders started working with even greater enthusiasm and justified excitement, anticipating the long-awaited fulfillment of their goals.

To define further objectives and new plan of actions it was decided to convene an All Muslim Congress as soon as possible. The Congress held in Moscow on May 1917 was in real terms All-Russian Muslim Congress, because not only Turkic but all the Muslim nationalities of Russia were invited to it. The 900 delegates that participated in this Congress far exceeded the number of 450 that had been originally expected.²⁴ Kazan Tatars and the moderate right-wing dominated the Congress. An atmosphere full of joy and enthusiasm, encouraged the delegates to reach unanimity on most of the points. The Congress's agenda included a range of problems from the reconstruction of the Muslim Ecclesiastic Administration to cultural autonomy for the Muslims.²⁵

When the head of the Foreign Religious Bureau of the Ministry of Interior and Commissar of the Department of Alien Religions S.A.Kotlyarevskiy, speaking on behalf of the Provisional Government, concentrated only on religious issues, some delegates (Ayaz Ishaki and Gali Merdan Topçubaşı) were quick to notice that the spectrum of problems of Muslims of Russia were not limited only by religious issues and could not be viewed just through the prism of religion. In his speech Ayaz Ishaki expressed his criticism and pointed out that the Muslims of Russia had needs more serious and urgent than religious ones.²⁶ After heated debate an important resolution concerning structural organization of the Russian state was passed by the Congress.

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This resolution was adopted by the majority vote (446 against 271) and favored democratic reconstruction of the Russian Empire into a federal state divided into national-territorial units.²⁷ Among the supporters of the federal system based on territorial autonomy were such prominent intellectuals as Zeki Velidi Togan, Hadi Maksudi, Fatih Kerimi, Ali Merdan Topçubaşı, and Resulzade.²⁸ In his response to the Dagistani Social-Democrat Ahmad Tsalikov, who was against the creation of the territorial autonomies on the ground that it would divide the Muslims of Russia, the Azerbaijani leader Resulzade made a meaningful speech:

... In the future, in my opinion, Russia should be a federation consisting of autonomous territories. Russia's future political organization must satisfy all of its peoples, each one of whom should have its own national home....We want national Turkic autonomous local statehood (milli mahalli muhtariat).....To concretize my suggestions, I recommend the creation of autonomous Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Turkestan, Kazakhstan, etc., since all these people have their specific local particularities... Each of these autonomous states should govern its local affairs and have its own national administration...For the purpose of coordinating the religious and cultural development of these autonomous territories an All-Russian Muslim Council should be formed.²⁹

The thesis of Resulzade found many supporters from different regions and finally the resolution was adopted. The text of the resolution stated that the type of governmental structure that would best serve the interests of the Muslim peoples of Russia was:

- a) A democratic republic based on national, territorial-federative principles. Those Muslim peoples not possessing their own separate territory should be granted national-cultural autonomy.
- b) To regulate and coordinate the cultural and religious affairs of the Muslim peoples of Russia, a Central Muslim administration should be created.³⁰

The fact that the Muslim delegates did not adhere to similar political ideology, seriously impeded reaching a consensus on crucial matters such as the creation of a single political party. Despite this, the parties managed to achieve compromise on

almost all matters. Among the most noticeable achievements of the Congress was the creation of the common Muslim Council (*Milli Şura*). This organ, with local branches in each region, was to coordinate political activities. The resolution proposed by Ayaz Ishaki and concerning creation of a Muslim Council reads as follows:

A central body to serve all the Muslims of Russia shall be created for the following purposes: in order to assure united and coordinated actions among all the political parties and organizations; in order to administer effectively the spiritual and cultural affairs of all the Muslim ethnic groups of Russia; in order to have power of legislation within its own jurisdiction.³¹

Great importance was also attached to such serious issues as the political and cultural autonomy of the Muslim areas, extension of the cultural and religious rights of the Muslim population, unification of all Muslim education throughout the Russian empire along *Jadid* lines, emancipation of women, abolishment of compulsory military obligations and creation of exclusively Muslim national military units.³² The resolutions on these issues were accepted with few debates.

Unfortunately, the lack of ideological unity among the various national groups represented in the Congress and later in the National Council, *Şura*, worsened the situation, provoking further tension and clashes. The fact that many of the Muslim delegates were fervent proponents of the Social Democrats and revolutionary left, while others belonged to the pan-Turkic nationalist bloc, caused them to see the problems from different perspective, which later deepened the division between them.

The Second All-Russian Muslim Congress was held in Kazan in July 1917. This meeting was dominated by the Tatars, because the Central Asians and the Azeris boycotted the Congress due to their unwillingness to cooperate with the Tatars.³³ During this session the extraterritorial autonomy of “all the Muslims of central Russia

and Siberia”, based on the project of cultural and national autonomy, elaborated by Sadri Maksudi, was proclaimed.³⁴ The administrative and governing organs of the autonomy were to be the National Parliament (*Milli Mejlis*) and the Muslim Ecclesiastic Administration located in Ufa.³⁵

Simultaneously with the Second All-Russian Muslim Congress, the Muslim Military Congress was convened in Kazan in July 1917. This Congress decided to create an All-Russian Muslim Central Military Council (*Harbi Şura*), under the chairmanship of I.Alkin, to organize Muslim military units.³⁶ The *Harbi Şura* managed to get permission from the government to form special Muslim units after which Muslim soldiers were drawn together.³⁷

These developments were the last to take place before the October Revolution. Evolution of events continued after the Bolshevik Revolution too, but now in completely different direction. Though, later Muslim leaders raised the issue of the autonomous administration for different Muslim communities, the Bolshevik leadership refused to accept it, making everything taboo that could activate memories of the past.

CHAPTER II

THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE MUSLIM REPUBLICS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

2.1. The Phenomenon of *Nomenclatura* in the Muslim Republics of the Russian Federation

The dramatic upheaval of October 26, 1917 changed the fate of the Muslims. Lenin's promise about self-determination and the right of secession was nothing but a deceptive tactical maneuver to win the support of the Muslim minorities. Hopes for national self-rule dimmed after the Revolution, when all the Muslim organizations such as *Milli Şura*, *Millet Mejlisi*, and *Harbi Şura* were dismantled. All the Muslim nations were thoroughly divided into the numerous artificial quasi-autonomies, subordinated to Moscow thereby frustrating their desire to unite and regain equality. By imposing "autonomous structures" on the Muslim nationalities, the Bolsheviks suppressed all the previous aspirations of the Muslims to consolidate, so long ripened and cherished by them.

With the the stabilization of the Soviet regime the Soviet leaders subsequently demonstrated that they had no intention of allowing the national minorities to exercise the right to decide important internal matters in any sphere. Towards the end of the 1920's, Moscow started to oppose every manifestation of national individualism, and gradually, all Muslim national efforts and almost everything that has been achieved during the years before the revolution came to an end.

The post-revolutionary fate of the Muslim peoples of Russia was shaped within the framework of the so-called Nationalities Policy, and almost all the Muslim nations of Russia fell victim of this policy. The key of the Soviet success in imposing central control over the Muslim territories may be found in the Nationality Policy. The main objective of the Nationality Policy was the division of the Muslim community as far as possible, creation of the artificially drawn titular Autonomous Republics and regions, and isolation of different Muslim areas from one another and from outside influences. Five Muslim nations (Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Karachay-Balkars, and Meskhetian Turks) were removed from their ancestral homelands and deported to the remote places in Central Asia and Siberia.

To establish economic and technological dependency of the national peripheries upon Russia, the Soviets artificially divided the Muslim population on a great number of separate elements that had no direct links with one another. Since the October revolution, dozens of national formations have been created by the Kremlin leadership. The Soviets apparently considered the national aspirations of the Muslims of Russia satisfied by the creation of these autonomous republics. The problem of non-Russian minorities has been solved by retention of absolute power in the hands of the central authorities in Moscow. The final Sovietization of the Muslim nations was achieved by the co-optation of native elites who, by joining the "Communist class", have become as alienated from the rest of their ethnic milieu as the Russian apparatchiks are.

Moscow had no confidence in the political reliability of the old Muslim national communist intelligentsia, therefore the creation of new national cadres

loyal to Moscow was imperative. To provide a standard governing apparatus everywhere and minimize the danger of the internal disorder, the Soviet system created the phenomenon of *nomenclatura* - nationless Communist partocrats.

To defuse the unrest and mollify the intelligentsia it was necessary to make concessions in language policy and nativization of the *apparatus* of the republics. This nativization would provide the means for promoting workers, who were less educated and more dependent upon Stalin's machine, into leadership roles where they could then supplant the more obstreperous intelligentsia.³⁸

The Kremlin leadership realised that the only way to ensure effective control over the Muslim regions was to train an indigenous local Party and state bureaucracy which would be loyal to Moscow. The decision to create a national communist elite was prescribed by Lenin and approved by the 8th Communist Party Congress in 1919:

The allocation of Party workers is wholly in the hands of the Party Central Committee. Its decisions are obligatory for all. The Central Committee guarantees the conducting of the most resolute struggle against all forms of localistic tendencies and separatism in these matters.³⁹

The drive was launched to train Party cadres which were "national in form and socialist in content".⁴⁰ The Communist University of Workers of the East was established in Moscow to train reliable, cadres. Later this development was followed by the foundation in each republic of the notorious Party Schools (*Partshkola*), the purpose of which was to turn out élite of functionaries to execute all orders from Moscow.⁴¹

In the past the cooperation of native politicians with Moscow was essential for success, today the situation is not different. All the power positions in the national republics are still occupied by former Communists. The national Communist parties continue to rule in all the republics, albeit under different party names. To enhance their power position, the leadership in the republics has to be in a tacit alliance with

the Russian authorities. In its turn the existencence of national bureaucrats is necessary for the Russian authorities. The presence of national *nomenclatura* in the republics make it easier for the central authorities in Moscow to deal with any kind of opposition at the local level. As long as the present *nomenclatura* remains in power it will not be difficult for the Russian authorities to terminate any unwanted political movements in the ethnic republics. Nowadays the old power division system works even more effectively than before: all kinds of democratic and national progressive forces in the ethnic republics are suppressed by the hands of their own “national” *nomenclatura*, the loyal guards of the old regime and central authorities. Moscow, cut short any nationalistic agitation questioning its rule; at the same time it showed remarkable tolerance toward abuses of power by local native authorities.

Separation of the Muslim community into quasi-nation states headed by subservient emissaries of the central power served Moscow’s interests in the Soviet years, and seems to do the same in the post-Soviet period. Therefore, when analyzing current political parties and movements in the Muslim republics today, it is essential to give adequate attention to those who occupy power positions in the national republics, i.e. national *nomenklatura* through which the Center still successfully exercises its rule.

The national leadership in the ethnic republics could not get rid of the traditional totalitarian mentality and centralized power structures, and continue to treat every political formation outside the government with exaggerated suspicion and hostility. The present governing apparatus in the national republics, is ill disposed to everything that develops independently from the government course, seriously

impeding the activities of the opposition. Today it is much more difficult for the national political movements to voice their aspirations due to severe discriminative measures imposed by the national *nomenclatura* to satisfy the central authorities. If the dimension of the flagrant power abuses by the national political elite in the Central Asian republics alarms international human rights organizations, in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation the situation is not much different. Thus the camouflaged political terror and oppression of the national opposition in Tatarstan resulted in the consolidation of several political movements and parties of different ideologies under the *Popular Patriotic Union of Tatarstan* in a protest towards the current antidemocratic regime.⁴²

Although modern Islamic revival does not challenge the state system, the present leadership consisting of old Communists is against everything that can constitute political opposition, with no exception for Islam. Despite the fact that Islam helps to rehabilitate the national cultures and national identity of the Muslims, the national *nomenclatura* in the Muslim republics have little interest in strengthening political Islam in their republics.

Today without a proper understanding of the political structure of the Muslim republics, political culture, traditions and the mentality of their leadership, it will be difficult to comprehend the current political potential concentrated in these republics.

Since the potential of political unity of the Muslims of Russia is the subject of this research, I find it necessary to illustrate the political situation inside each autonomous republic. Political unity can be realized under the certain conditions such as: uniformity of demands, similarity of goals, appropriate leadership based on unity

of mind, and desire to unite. Today, the myriad of local problems, that all the Muslim republics inherited from the Soviet past, hampers the unification of the Muslims.

2.1.The Republic of Tatarstan.

The Tatar Autonomous Republic has been artificially constructed in such a manner as to exclude a large proportion of the Tatar population. In this regard the Tatar Republic is unique among the Soviet Republics; in none of the others does the indigenous population represents so small a proportion of the total. At the time of its formation in 1920, the boundaries were drawn in such a way as to encompass only 1 459 600, or little more than a third of the approximately 4 200 000 Tatars then living in the Soviet Russia.⁴³

The unfavorable position of the Tatars in Russia is explicable first by historical factors, and, second by distrust of the Tatars, who both before and after the revolution made constant attempts to gain independence for themselves and other Turkic peoples. To avoid such a threat the Soviet regime adopted a nationality policy in regard to the Tatars aimed at keeping them a minority in their own republic. After the elimination of Tatar national schools, standard Soviet schools were established and, thus, the compulsory teaching of Russian became the means for the upbringing of the new international man. (Never under the communist rule did the Tatar population in Tatarstan exceed 50% out of the total population in the republic).⁴⁴ .

Although the Tatars were one of the largest peoples of the Soviet Union, the Tatar republic was granted only an autonomous status. Stalin reported scornfully that the Tatars had as much chance of achieving Union republic status as of seeing their

own ears.⁴⁵ The official Soviet explanation for the Tatar Republic's lack of Union status was that it does not border on the Soviet frontiers. Technically speaking it is so, but the main reason behind this inferior status was the right of secession; in case of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, all the Union republics could automatically become independent states, whereas Autonomous republics did not have such a right.⁴⁶

In the complex federative system of the Soviet Union, the Tatar and Bashkir Autonomous Republics became the constituent republics of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR), which itself was one of the constituent republics, a Union republic of the Soviet Union. In a comparatively short period, between 1920 and 1923, the government of the RSFSR established on its territory seventeen autonomous regions and republics.⁴⁷ But in reality, the central government treated these autonomous republics only as administrative districts, rather than autonomous ethnic entities. The government of the RSFSR retained in the conquered territories full control over military, economic, financial, and foreign affairs.

The autonomous regions (sometimes called "Toilers' Communes") had no distinguishing juridical features even in terms of Soviet law and were described by one Soviet authority as "*national gubernii*". The autonomous republics, on the other hand, were regarded as endowed with a certain degree of political competence, although what the limits of this competence were posed a question that troubled the best legal minds of the time.⁴⁸

As was mentioned earlier, the attributes of the Soviet form of government in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan were more or less similar to those in other autonomous republics: the farcical Supreme Soviet and Presidium with no real authority, the Council of Ministers, and all-powerful Republican Committee of the Communist Party. The only organ that held real power was the Republican Committee of the

Communist Party. In all republics, *oblasts*, *krais* and *rayons* the whole state governmental structure was subordinated to the control of the Party apparatus, or to the Central Committee of each republic. The First Party Secretary of the Central Committee was a national, whereas the Second Secretary a Russian. Local non-Russian communists, who did not know Russian, could not work in the Party apparatus. In consequence of their minority status within their own republics many Muslim peoples in the Russian Federation lacked full opportunity to play a leading part in the economic, administrative and cultural life of the republic and of the Federation.

It is quite natural that during the seventy years of the Soviet regime nothing significant could happen in the political life and administrative structure of the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation.

The ideological vacuum, which occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought nations back to their historical roots. After the years of state-led oppression, the idea of national self-determination overwhelmed national republics. Immediately, as a natural phenomenon, at the end of the 1980-s numerous national front movements and political parties emerged in the ethnic republics, raising the concept of independence and the right of self-determination. Among the first republics proclaimed independence was Tatarstan.

But change in the political status of the republic did not result in change of the administrative cadres of Tatarstan. As in almost all of the states, Soviet-era leaders have held onto power in Tatarstan. The Russian authorities quickly realized that the only way to keep Tatarstan under control was the preservation of the old communists

in power. The Yeltsin administration knew, that if a compliant regime existed in Tatarstan, then Russian authority would certainly prevail. The most powerful element of the Soviet society responsible for the preservation of the regime had been always the Party apparatus. Thus, the Moscow authorities gave Shaimiev absolute power, the right to perform the role of ideological gendarme, but under one condition - to eliminate the national opposition. Shaimiev firmly guaranteed Moscow that he "will never allow the extremist forces to seize power in Tatarstan".⁴⁹ These "extremist forces" in Tatarstan were advocating not only independence of Tatarstan, but also the unity of Turco-Muslim subjects of the Russian Federation. Today in the Muslim republics the initiatives concerning unity along the Turkic or religious lines come from the opposition parties, the official governments avoid dealing with the issues that may create an aggressive counteraction from Moscow.

For the Russian authorities it was vitally important that Tatarstan forget its aspirations for independence, while for the local communists it was essential to stay in power at any cost. Thus, two fundamental threats - the possibility of secession, and national-patriotic movements would be eliminated simply by one maneuver, by retaining the old apparatus in power. For the sake of his power position, Shaimiev quickly forgot that it was the Tatar nationalists who saved him from the hands of the Russian court for his support of the coup d'état in 1991.

Consequently after 1993 the government of Tatarstan openly began to deviate from the sovereignty line. The sovereign course of Tatarstan ended with the *Bilateral Treaty on Mutual Delegation of Authorities* signed in February 1994. The Treaty opened a new stage in the development of Russian federalism.

The bilateral power-sharing treaty between Moscow and Tatarstan is merely a broad statement of principles. The key power-sharing arrangements were detailed in 12 cooperation agreements where the autonomous rights of the republic are severely restricted. The bilateral treaty makes up 60-70 per cent of the Federal Treaty's text. Although federal authorities claimed that they had granted broad powers to the "sovereign republics within the Russian Federation", in reality nothing changed in the economic and political status of the republics. The ownership of land and natural resources were put under the joint jurisdiction of the local and federal governments. The Treaty recognizes the authority of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.⁵⁰ When signing the bilateral treaty that marked the legal end of the sovereignty of his republic, the Tatarstan president Shaimiev proudly concluded: "Strong Republics, strong center."⁵¹ However Tatarstan did not become stronger. After the signing of agreement, it turned out to be no more than an administrative sub-division of the Russian Federation with administrative organs whose functions are essentially identical to those in any of the other territories.

For Moscow signing the power-sharing treaty with Tatarstan was very important, to serve as a model to regulate relations with other republics, specially with Chechnya. Later, a series of treaties on the same basis was concluded with other resource-rich republics such as Bashkortostan, Sakha, Kabartay-Balkar, North Ossetia, Buryatiya and Udmurtiya. Along with "sovereign" state Tatarstan, Yekaterinburg, Kaliningrad, Krasnodar, Komi-Permyak and many other of Russia's regions concluded bilateral treaties with Moscow.⁵² Only the republic of Chechnya was an exception to the bilateral treaty club.

Although only a few of these treaties were published and nobody knows the exact details behind the numerous cooperation agreements enclosed in the treaties, according to the federalists such treaties minimize the secession potential of the ethnic republics. Yeltsin was absolutely right when he said that bilateral treaties “strengthen Russian statehood”.⁵³ As the bilateral treaties advanced, the federal government altered the terminology in the documents to limit recognition of statehood. Concern of the central authorities about “legal separatism” in the regions is already expressed in a law declaring the Russian constitution and federal legislation to be supreme throughout Russian Federation territory. The law, recently adopted by the state Duma on 25 April 1997, in its nature rejects the bilateral power-sharing agreements signed between the federal government and 26 regions.⁵⁴

Since that time the relationship between the national political élite and their Russian patrons remained stable and balanced. One month after the signing of the treaty, Tatarstan president Shaimiev and Tatarstan Supreme Soviet Chairman Farid Muhametšin became deputies to the federal council of the Russian parliament.⁵⁵ To assure his loyalty to Russia, the president of the Tatarstan Republic M. Shaimiev became one of the leading members and most active supporters of the Russian prime minister Victor Chernomyrdin’s movement “Our Home is Russia”.⁵⁶

In Tatarstan, Shaimiev was treated as a traitor; as a *Shah Gali* by the Tatar national movement,⁵⁷ but Moscow seemed to be very satisfied. If in the past the Yeltsin administration perceived Tatarstan as a serious threat to the Russian territorial integrity and “bad example” for other autonomous republics, now Tatarstan became

an exemplary model for the regulating federal relations. Thus, instead of Tatar statehood, the Tatar people get a “Tatar model of statehood.”

Now the political course of sovereign Tatarstan develops in the shadow of the political course chosen by the Russian government. The political and economic situation in Russia has considerable influence on Tatarstan, specially its economy.

As soon as the Federal authorities secured the position of Tatarstan within the Russian borders, they launched a campaign against the Tatar national-patriotic movements. This was done, as many times in the history, by the hands of the Tatar *nomenclatura*. The scenario was simple: counter-rallies organized by the local *nomenclatura* to hinder the “unconstitutional behavior” of the opposition. This scenario was effective in all ethnic republics, except Chechnya.

The reorganization of power echelons was immediately accomplished in the republic. By manipulating election rules, Shaimiev expelled members of the opposition from the highest legislative and executive organs. All the heads of local administrations, were subordinated directly to the President himself.

To counteract to the All-Tatar People *Kurultay* and *Milli Meclis*, the puppet International Congress of Tatars and its Executive Committee was created from the state budget. Legal proceedings were initiated against the *Milli Meclis*, the *Ittifaq* party, and individual leaders of the national movement. The political parties that supported independence were refused in registration in the regions, under the pretext that their actions endangered stability in the republic. The culmination of all this was the arbitrary decision of the court to expel *Ittifaq* from its building.⁵⁸

To show that the demands for sovereignty come not from the legislative organs but from the group of peoples on the street meetings, the authorities spent all efforts to keep the nationalist and democratic parties out of the Parliament. During the last parliamentary elections in Tatarstan, which were held in 1995, the whole state apparatus was mobilized to prevent “extreme” forces from winning the seats in the Parliament.

Until 1995, the highest executive and administrative organ of Tatarstan was the *Gossovet* (State Council). In the past it possessed real authority, but today its nominal powers are severely restricted. After the general elections in 1995, the Tatar parliament was immediately re-structured, and the old-guard bureaucrats and the heads of administration took the parliamentary seats of democrat and national-patriots. Many laws adopted by the old Parliament were altered or canceled, and new laws giving absolute authority and limitless power to the President were adopted. Even the Constitution endured numerous amendments; many articles were eradicated and replaced by new ones. Thus, in the old Constitution the term of presidency was limited: the president could not be reelected more than two times, and the age of the president could not exceed 65. The newly elected parliament, by an order of the president Shaimiev, abolished this article and adopted a new concept of unlimited life-long presidency.⁵⁹ Although the Tatar language is proclaimed as a state language, meetings in the Parliament are held in Russian.

The official government of the sovereign Tatar Republic is a typical example of the government of an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. It works under close supervision by the President and does not enjoy much power in practice.

In the past the government, Cabinet of Ministers and Ministers had to be ratified through the Parliament, now all the members of the executive apparatus are appointed personally by the President himself, without any ratification by the Parliament.

During the presidential elections on 1996, president Shaimiev was re-elected. He was the sole candidate on the ballot. The Russian constitution prohibits candidates from running unopposed, but the amended Tatar constitution does not.⁶⁰

Due his political compliance and pliability the present president of Tatarstan has never enjoyed much confidence in the eyes of the national intelligentsia. Today the purely selfish interests of the leading political élite, clash with the patriotism and nationalism of the local opposition parties. Such division in political leadership in the national republics created two completely separate groups of as state leaders and national leaders. The only exception was the ethnic region where the republican leader was himself also the leader of the nationalist organization - Chechnya.

For a better understanding of the political situation in Tatarstan, it is necessary to know that today the Tatar people and the people of Tatarstan are two different things. The Soviet autonomous republics were designed with the purpose to create mixed, polytechnic republics. The republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are the best example of this ethno-administrative experiment. Today neither Tatarstan nor Bashkortostan may claim that their republics belong to the Tatar or Bashkir nations. Both republics have considerable amount of Russian population, which is also an inalienable part of the people of Tatarstan or Bashkortostan. There are the peoples, or simply the citizens of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Today the statehood of Tatarstan is based on the principle of territorial (geographic), not ethnic sovereignty. The

Tatarstan state is described by the Tatar president Shaimiev as “a democratic state expressing will and interests of the whole multinational people of the republic”.⁶¹ Therefore, the government of Tatarstan using the slogan: “Tatarstan is for the Tatarstanis” (*Tatarstan dlya Tatarstantsev*), conducts a balanced policy towards the abstract Tatarstani people, “expressing the will and the interests of the whole multinational people of Tatarstan”.⁶² The interests of the Tatar people are represented by the government only as much as the interests of the Russians and other nationalities.

Those who are interested in the political and historical development of the Tatar nation alone, must not associate the development of the Tatar nation within the context of the political course of the government of Tatarstan, because the government of Tatarstan represents the interests of all the peoples, citizens of Tatarstan, not the Tatar nation. It was due to the political traditions of the Tatar intelligentsia and high political culture of the Tatar people, that the Tatar nation has once again openly demonstrated its willingness to survive as a distinct nation.

2.2.The Republic of Bashkortostan.

The autonomous Bashkir Republic was established on March 23, 1919 on the basis of a vernacular with no written form. Up to creation of the two separate Tatar and Bashkir republics, Tatar was a common language for these two Muslim and Turkic peoples. It is difficult to find other peoples in Russia and the former Soviet Union so close and akin to each other as Tatars and Bashkirs. Being an enclave, Bashkortostan, like Tatarstan was isolated from the rest of Islamic world. Despite the

commonality of history, culture and language, today the Bashkirs do not support the idea of unification or confederation with Tatarstan. Before the Revolution there was no antagonism between the Tatar and Bashkir peoples, but nowadays Tatarstan's relations with Bashkortostan are far from satisfactory.

A new republic of Bashkortostan was constructed in such a manner as to have a large number of Tatars within its borders reduced the Bashkirs to a minority status within their own republic. In 1922 the districts of Belebeev, Birska, and Ufa, where the Tatars represented the majority of the population, were excluded from Tatar Republic and joined to Bashkortostan. As a result of artificial division, the Bashkirs constitute only 21.9. percent out of total population in Bashkortostan, after the Russians, who are 39.3, and Tatars who are 28.4 percent.⁶³

Bashkortostan and Tatarstan have followed very different national policies. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Bashkir leadership adopted pro-Russian policies which do not emphasize political sovereignty. Bashkortostan from the beginning signed the Federal Treaty and became an eager proponent of the policy of integration with Russia. While Tatarstan boycotted the referendum in 1993, Bashkortostan actively participated in it, giving full support to Yeltsin and his policies.

Later, when Tatarstan was forced to sign a bilateral treaty on the mutual delegation of authorities, Bashkortostan authorities scornfully noticed that "unlike Tatarstan they have a firm course, and they never changed their position 180 degree as Tatarstan does".⁶⁴ Politicized ethnicity among the Bashkirs was not as strong and popular as among the Tatars. Therefore, from the beginning, the Bashkir President

Murtaza Rahimov stressed the economic sovereignty of the republic. The government of Bashkortostan has always concentrated on economic problems, disregarding serious political problems inside the republic. Such intensive claims of economic autonomy are based on dreams of a petroleum paradise. The Bashkir authorities believe that by gaining full control over the country's oil reserves, the republic will secure its economic prosperity and welfare. But it can not be said that Bashkortostan has made considerable headway in gaining economic independence. The export of oil, petrochemical goods and products of the military-industrial complex are still under the strict control of the Russian authorities. All hopes about economic self-rule disappeared when Bashkortostan was forced to sign the economic supplementary to the federal treaty.⁶⁵ In other words, like Tatarstan, Bashkortostan has as much independence as the bilateral treaty permits it to have.

Another reason for the concentration on economic issues is the existence of serious political problems. By giving priority to economic issues, the Bashkir leadership has removed the national problem from the agenda of the republic.

Bashkortostan is a typical example of a polyethnic state, but the leadership generally ignores the ethno-national structure of the republic. Although the Bashkirs constitute only 21.9 per cent of the total population in the republic - stay on the third place after the Russians and Tatars - the present Bashkir government treats the republic as a national state with one central ethnos - the Bashkirs.⁶⁶ It is doubtful whether the Soviets have succeeded in providing the Bashkirs with a specific national culture and a Bashkir historical tradition. Therefore, the Bashkirs are extremely conscious of Tatar domination.

Since 1994 the Bashkir government have been working a project called "The Ethnoses of Bashkortostan". In this project the Bashkir authorities attempt to resolve national problem of Bashkortostan by giving equal status to all major nationalities of the republics.⁶⁷ However, national equality has not been achieved , and the Tatars, the second largest nationality of the Bashkir republic, still suffer national discrimination.

In addition to its ethnic problems, Bashkortostan suffers from serious ecological problems. During the Soviet years the Bashkir population suffered several times medically and genetically the consequences of repeated atomic explosions in the region. In the 1990's the citizens of Ufa underwent mass-poisoning caused by the leakage of phenol to the city water system.⁶⁸

The political leadership of the Bashkir republic is in its nature and composition similar to that of Tatarstan. There is Bashkir-dominated parliament composed of the ex-communists. On 12 January 1992 Murtaza Rahimov, a former refinery director and chairman of the Supreme Soviet, was elected president.⁶⁹

Unlike his counterpart in Tatarstan, president Rahimov adopted a liberal policy towards the Bashkir national opposition parties. It can be even said that there is substantial solidarity on some matters between the Bashkir government and opposition parties.⁷⁰ The Bashkir authorities jealously guard the existence of a distinct Bashkir nation, because without the presence of the Bashkir nation, there would be no Bashkir republic. For the authorities, the preservation of the Bashkir nation is a matter of dignity, otherwise they would be obliged to recognize that Bashkirs as well as "their" lands as a historical part of the Tatar nation.

2.3.The North Caucasus

Like the Muslims of the Volga-Ural region the Caucasian peoples were interested in the formation of independent republic. In May 1917 the First North Caucasian Congress set up the Central Committee of the Union of the North Caucasus and Dagestan. Full authority in the regions was assumed by the Central Committee of the Union of the Mountain People and exercised through local Chechen, Ingush, Balkar and other councils.⁷¹ At the Third North Caucasian Congress which was held on September 1917, it was decided that the future of the North Caucasus could only be assured by separation from Russia and proclamation of national independence. On May 1918 the independent North Caucasian Republic was proclaimed. During the brief period of the United Mountain Republic, the Caucasian peoples were ruled by a single unified government for the first time.

During the period of the establishment of the Soviet regime the North Caucasus became a ferocious battle field among major forces: the Bolsheviks, the Caucasian nationalists, the White Army of Denikin together with Cossaks and the Muslim religious groupings.⁷²

General Denikin leading the Volunteer Army in South Russia was fighting for a united, undivided Russia and was strongly hostile to anti-Russian nationalist movements. Bitter fighting took place between Denikin's army and the local nationalists and civilian population.

In the light of these developments, the Muslim *sheihs* and Socialist intelligentsia made crucial tactical mistake by joining the Bolsheviks in a struggle for the liberation of their homelands. The Red Army was greeted as an ally by the local

peoples who had been engaged in war for their freedom. Once again the national intelligentsia of the Caucasus was attracted by the national program of the Bolsheviks, which promised the right of all nations of the former Russian Empire to “self-determination, including secession”. In his famous speech addressed to the North Caucasian peoples and concerned autonomy, Stalin stated:

The whole purpose of autonomy is to involve the mountain people in the governing of their country... It is essential that your people are drawn into all spheres of administration of the country. The sort of autonomy we are talking here is that under which your people, knowing your language, your way of life, are present in all administrative organs.⁷³

At first in place of a single North Caucasus Republic, two republics were created: On January 1919 the Mountain (Gorskaya) ASSR (which embraced six peoples), and in November of the same year the Dagestan ASSR.⁷⁴

The Mountain Republic comprised Chechnia, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay. The creation of the Mountain Republic was met with great enthusiasm and optimism of all the nations represented within it. The Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of the Soviets of the Mountain Republic adopted on 22 April 1921, stated that “all the peoples of the Mountain ASSR are independent and free to decide the means of development and creation of national culture.”⁷⁵ The *Shariat* and the *adat* were officially acknowledged as the basic constitutional laws of the Mountain Republic.⁷⁶ Although Stalin himself stated that “the Soviet Government considers the *shariat* to be as rightful and customary a law as any in force among other people of the USSR”⁷⁷, this was a very unusual attitude for the Soviet system of government.

In order to break up the unity of the Caucasian peoples, the Soviets granted pseudo-autonomies to almost every Caucasian nationality. Gradually autonomous

regions were created out of the sub-divided Soviet Mountain Republic. Karachay-Cherkess (12 January 1922), Kabartay-Balkar (16 January 1922), Adygey (27 July 1922), Chechen (20 November 1922).⁷⁸

By the Decree of 7 July 1924, the remnants of the Soviet Mountain republic were finally disbanded and in its place two autonomous regions, North Ossetia and Ingushetia came into being.⁷⁹ All these autonomous republics together with Dagestan, became a part of the RSFSR, and were subordinated directly to the central government of the RSFSR.

The political and administrative reordering made by the Soviet authorities did not fulfill the expectations of the North Caucasian communists. The nationality question in the multinational Caucasus was resolved “at one stroke” without taking into consideration historical past and tribal interests of the peoples living here. The Soviets forcibly resettled different ethnic groups distorting the ethnic balance in many regions. The demarcations of the frontiers in the North Caucasus were made without adequate attention to the ethnic and linguistic peculiarities. To keep this turbulent region weak the notorious *divide and rule* strategy was applied on large scale. This policy put disparate peoples together and divided closely related tribes.

Thus, the Kabartay-Balkar Republic was designed to incorporate two unrelated nationalities: the Kabardinians, the indigenous mountain people and make up 48 per cent of the population, and the Turkic speaking Balkars, who make up 9 per cent.⁸⁰ These peoples are very distinct from each other in cultural and historical terms. Karachay and Balkars, two peoples having virtually the same language and traditions, were separated without any pretext.

The situation was similar in the Karachay-Cherkes republic, where the Turkic-speaking Karachay (a kindred people to the Balkars) and the Cherkes (a kinfolk of the Kabartay people), were forcibly brought together into one the republic.

As everywhere else, the Bolsheviks socialized the North Caucasus lands by dubious and crude methods, depriving the local communities almost of everything. Together with the Chechens and Ingushs, Karachays, Balkars, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars and Germans were deported. The Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 24 November 1948 states: "The resettlement of the Chechens, Ingushs, Karachais, Balkars, Kalmyks, Germans, Crimean Tatars and others to the different regions of the Soviet Union, has been done ones and for all, without any right to return to the former places of settlement."⁸¹

The outcome of all these developments is that the North Caucasus turned to be a potential arena for conflict. Today every republic of the North Caucasus has its own range of problems that could burst out into violent conflict. One such region is Dagestan. Dagestan, a heavily Muslim region, has a strategically important position in the North Caucasus on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Taking into account a high level of religiosity and conservatism of the local peoples, the Bolsheviks applied a more cautious policy to Dagestan. In his speech at the Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan on November 13, 1920, in Temirkhanshura (Buynaksk), Stalin declared that "Dagestan must be governed in accordance with its national peculiarities and customs."⁸² Actually, there was a certain degree of truth in Stalin's words. Dagestan has been always ruled according to its own unwritten, unseen customary law of *adat*. The Dagestanis treated communism with a healthy skepticism, viewing it as a

continuation of Tsarist expansionism, and adapting it to the needs of the republic as before. Without these “concessions” this conservative, but at the same time, explosive and incendiary region would hardly adapt to Communist rule. The leader of the Kumyk national movement *Tenglik* said: “In our society from the communist times the upper hand to decide, judge and combine administrative functions with the traditions of the *cemaat*, always belonged to the administrative authorities”.⁸³

The internal situation of Dagestan, is more complicated than that of any other republics. Today there are more than thirty different nationalities living in Dagestan, but the Dagestanis are not consolidated into one nation. The communist authorities of Dagestan simply mixed all the population of the republic, but no one people in Dagestan has officially defined political status. Therefore, the “nationality question” potentially is more explosive in Dagestan.

As everywhere else, the administrative system of this region was designed according to the crude territorial principle. Dagestan has a unique natural landscape: from one side the mountains of the Caucasus, from another side the valleys of the Caspian lowlands. The Republic of Dagestan was created on the place of the old *Dagestan oblast*, without taking into account interests of many peoples living on this territory. In 1922 year, it was decided to resettle indigenous Mountain peoples to the valleys. The process of the forced resettlement of the Mountaineers to the plains continued up to 1990. This forced resettlement of some peoples of Dagestan created the so-called *prikutanniye zemli*, appropriated lands, as land in the plains was distributed to the highlanders. The migration from the highlands of Avar and Dargin farmers provided numerical predominance of the outside settlers over the native

population of the valleys. As a result the percentage of the indigenous people of the valley dramatically decreased. Thus the Kumyk people, once the only native dwellers of the lowlands, consisting 60% in 1926, today became a minority of 23.9% on their own territory.⁸⁴ Another typical fact for Dagestan is a phenomenon of divided nation, like Lezgins, Avars and Nogays. The state frontier between Russia and Azerbaijan on the river Samur has placed half a million Dagestani Lezgins and Avars on the Azeri side. After the collapse of the Soviet Union these peoples find themselves on the different sides of national borders. Thus a part of the Lezgins now live in Dagestan, while another part live in Azerbaijan. The Lezgins of Dagestan founded a *Sadval* movement to press for border changes that would allow them to unite with the Lezgins of Azerbaijan. Today a border dispute is strained. Azeri officials have accused the Lezgin national movement *Sadval* of causing explosions in the Baku metro and 120 leaders of Lezgin and Avar national organizations have been banned from Azerbaijan.⁸⁵

For the time being, compared to other regions, Dagestan has remained a relatively loyal corner of Russia. But this does not mean that Dagestan is an exemplary Muslim republic. Economically, Dagestan is one of the poorest republics of the Russian Federation. The life expectancy here is lower than in other regions of the Caucasus.⁸⁶ Politically it is the most heterogeneous republic, exhausted by numerous internal problems among various cliques, clans, and tribal organizations.

According to many observers Dagestan is a comparative oasis of ethnic stability. But in reality, with hundreds of peoples, nations, tribes, cliques and clans, today's Dagestan resembles a Pandora's box. The ethnic communities in Dagestan

jealously keep an eye on each other, and the nationality of any public appointee is always noted. The system of ethnic quotas permeated all spheres of life. Feudal ways, social contrast, hidden dictatorship and discrimination among the different nationalities are evident. Everything is decided and ordered “*sverhu*”, or from the top. According to Magomedhan Magomethanov, a senior researcher in the Dagestan Institute of History, “The Local Dagestani leadership is making the socio-political situation worse. It includes many people who are the products of the communist regime, who beyond Moscow’s control turned their positions into a gravy train. It is openly said that posts are bought and many are filled by unknown bandits. Young people, without the means to support themselves, are turning to crime and joining armed gangs that operate inside the republic and in other parts of Russia”.⁸⁷

It is true that the peoples of Dagestan have been exhausted by the seventy-years obligatory friendship and false fraternity. Practically, the nationality question of Dagestan is obviously difficult to resolve. One of the leaders of the Kumyk popular front *Tenglik* stated “Today the nationality policy of the Dagestan must have multilateral character, taking into account the fact that there are nations willing to develop according to self-determination principles in their own way, but not as a part of the hypothetical, one and indivisible Dagestani people.”⁸⁸

This forcible unification of the peoples into a single republic did not, however eliminate the urge to gain autonomy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union almost every individual nationality in Dagestan has formed popular front movements and separate organizations to defend their rights and put an end to the double standard treatment within their own republic. The Kumyk national movement *Tenglik* put

forward the principle of the federalization of the Dagestan by creation of autonomous national-territorial units.⁸⁹ Together with the Kumyks many other nationalities of Dagestan demand federative restructuring of the republic where every ethnos would have its own territorial autonomy.⁹⁰ Some of the Lezgin leaders work on the project of national-cultural autonomy of the Lezgin people both in Azerbaijan and Dagestan.⁹¹ It seems that in the future in Dagestan two peoples: on the South the Lezgins and on the North the Kumyks, will play an important role.

Despite the corruption, political nihilism, and stagnation in the society, the role of Islam in Dagestan is much stronger than in many of the other Muslim republics of Russia. The strong right-wing clerical organizations, such as the Naqshbandi Brotherhood of Uzun Hadji still have a strong influence on the course of events in Daghestan.⁹²

Like Dagestan, the Kabartay-Balkar republic contains all the elements of the ethnic conflict. Just recently on November 1996, the Balkar people made a desperate attempt to free itself from the dominating rule of the Kabardinians. In November 1996 the National Council of the Balkar People held a Congress where the independence of the Balkar people and secession from the Kabartay-Balkar Republic was proclaimed. Under the chairmanship of the general Bekbov, the Congress leaders, in order to escape from the dictatorship of the Kabartay president Kokov, appealed to Yeltsin to submit the new republic to the Russian presidential rule. The Russian authorities refused to recognize this self-proclaimed republic, and soon after all the members of the Balkar National Council and participants of the Congress were arrested. The Balkar National Council was prohibited by law. Later General Bekbov

was forced to recant and make a public statement of rejection of all the decisions of the Congress. Once again, Kabartay President Kokov was left with absolute power and authority.⁹³ Nevertheless, a sense of unease and discontent within the republic remains, which could soon manifest itself again.

There is also scope for conflict in the Karachay-Cherkes Republic. In the Karachay-Cherkes Republic the Russians constitute 42.5 per cent. Karachay 31 per cent and Cherkes only 9.6 per cent.⁹⁴ Like many other nationalities in the Caucasus, these three nationalities were brought together against their will. As a natural phenomenon, the Karachai began to ask for a division of the autonomous republic on an administrative basis. The Cherkess reacted to the Karachai demands by forming their own movement, which opposed Karachai demands for separation. Frightened by the rise of the nationalistic sentiments, the Cossaks also began to organize.⁹⁵ The *partocrat* establishment in the republic resisted all these manifestations, and for now open conflict has been avoided.

The Ingush-Osset clash is one of the conflicts, that has deteriorated into a war. After the deportation in of the Ingush 1944, the *Prigorodniy* district of the Chechen-Ingush republics was annexed to the North Osset ASSR. When the Ingush were allowed to return, they found their homes and lands in the *Prigorodniy* district occupied by the Ossets. The North Ossetian authorities refused, however, to return the district under the jurisdiction of the Chechen-Ingush republic.⁹⁶ After the proclamation of the autonomous Ingush republic, centered on the *Prigorodniy* district the conflict became more fierce. The Ingush intensified their activities, and in 1992 this conflict resulted in a full-scale war with the involvement of troops from Russia,

North Ossetia, and the Ingush republic. Chechen volunteers were also involved in the conflict on the side of the Ingush.⁹⁷

One thing can be said in summation of the current situation in the Caucasus: at the moment almost all of the Caucasus nations are too busy with their own administrative, economic and political problems to work on supranational issues. Today the Caucasus peoples live dispersed in their national republics, in most cases associating themselves with citizenship of their republic, rather than with the supranational notion of being Caucasian Mountaineers (*Gortsy*).

After the general euphoria of 1990's, by the end of 1994, in many republics the characteristics of the totalitarian old regime began to reemerge, and national republics fell under the authority of reactionary governments. In many Caucasus republics, with exception of the Chechnya and Ingush republics, the moderate, conservative regimes reinforced their positions. The common features of these regimes are a conservative outlook, oligarchic politics and status quo policies. Instead of promoting pan-Caucasian unity, so necessary for this turbulent region, the official leadership persistently abstain from any kind of cooperation that can endanger their power positions.

Under these circumstances, unity is vitally necessary for the Caucasus and other Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. Despite the common tragedies and shared historical and political destiny, for the time being no strong united movement and democratic political parties have emerged. There are expressions of empathy and compassion towards Chechnya but, unfortunately, there is no real unity among the North Caucasian peoples, which are driven by nationalist conflicts and local political

rivalries. There are many local-scale popular front movements being established to defend the ethno-cultural values of certain nations, but none of the Caucasus peoples, except for Chechnia and Abkhazia, have expressed any desire for full political independence.

Despite these post-Soviet realities in the North Caucasus, and other Muslim republics, there is one reality that seems to be unchanged. The North Caucasus was defeated but undaunted. This fact came to the surface with Chechnya's proclamation of independence. Since the republic Ichkeriya is an independent state, the detailed account about the political situation in this republic is beyond the scope of this paper.

Today the Chechen republic is adapting to the new post-war reality. Whatever the outcome of the present crisis, independence is certainly the ultimate dream of the Chechens. The ultimate secession of the Chechenya would encourage other republics to opt for independence. Chechen war ended, opening a new, unknown phase in the Russo-Muslim relations.

CHAPTER III

ISLAM IN THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS; REGIONAL MUSLIM POLITICAL PARTIES

3.1. Islamic Renaissance in the Muslim Republics of Russia.

Today after the long period of isolation, Islam in Russia is experiencing a significant revival. After years of state-led repression, it is now acceptable for the Muslims to publicly display their religiosity. The trend of opening mosques, Koran-reading courses, training Islamic clergy increased throughout Russia. A creative interaction has developed between the Muslim republics of Russia and the Islamic world.

The rise of religious consciousness and nationalist sentiments paved the way towards to the creation of the numerous organizations along the religious lines. The political dynamics of Muslim life within the multinational Russian state, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, showed the political and religious maturity of the Muslims of Russia. Unlike their co-religionists in other parts of the former Soviet Union, the Muslims of Russia represent a highly politicized and economically developed community. Gaining a historical opportunity to voice their aspirations openly, the Muslim nations of Russia became the active participants in the country politics, forming numerous nation- and religion-based political associations and movements. In many places the process of regaining national identity was accompanied by the traditional ideas of statehood. The course of and national and

cultural revival of the Muslim peoples of Russia varied in forms and methods of its manifestation, but there was one thing in common; in all the Muslim regions the process of political revival was accompanied by the intensive religious rebirth.

A religious revival is a complex social phenomenon that can be studied from various angles. On one hand it is return to the traditional Muslim values through the practicing Islam, as an every-day fact, on the other hand it is rise of political Islam. Both aspects of the revival of Islam are present today in the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation.

3.1. The Tatarstan Republic

The territory of the Volga-Ural has been an Islamic bastion since the ninth century. With the centuries-long traditions of belonging to the Islamic civilization the Kazan Tatars are the most influential Muslim nation in Russia. As practicing Muslims the Tatars conform to the Sunni Hanafi school.

Islam and spiritual life of the Tatar nation are closely related with each other. For the Tatars preservation of national identity, culture and language against the Russification was an important issue. It was due to Islam that the Tatar nation, despite being subjected to the numerous russification attempts was preserved as a single united nation.

During the Soviet period Islam has been completely eliminated from the public life: mosques, *medreses* and other religious establishments had disappeared dramatically. Due to the absence of religious education the number of Tatars who said they were believers decreased during the Soviet period. However, after the

collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of Tatars who consider themselves believers increased substantially. In a social survey made in 1980 year in Tatarstan, only 43.5 per cent of the respondents considered themselves to be believers confessing Islam. Ten years later in 1990-91 years this percentage increased to 67 per cent. In a recent survey made by Moscow, 90 percent of the Tatars living in Tatarstan considered themselves Muslim believers.⁹⁸ Many Tatars who do not consider themselves believers still participate in religious customs and holidays. More than 80 per cent of the young Tatar couples have religious wedding ceremonies.⁹⁹

The start of the organized activities of the Muslims of Tatarstan dates to 1989, when the 1100th Hijri anniversary of adoption of Islam by the Bulgar Kingdom was celebrated. Thousands of Muslims participated in this religious anniversary. For the first time, official delegations from Turkey, Arab and other Muslim countries came to Russia to celebrate this significant event. For this reason, the famous *Azim* mosque which did not serve as a mosque for seventy years, was returned to the Muslims.

In the light of these developments, in 1992 the independent Spiritual Board of Tatarstan (*Tatarstan Diniye Nazareti*) was created. On 21 August 1992 in Ufa, there was a congress of the Muslim clergy, which announced the creation of the independent Spiritual Board of Bashkortostan. On the next day, in Tatarstan, in the city of Naberezhniye Chelny (Yar Çallı), the congress of the Muslim clergy of the Republic of Tatarstan proclaimed the creation of the Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan.¹⁰⁰ Today this Spiritual Board acts independently; training its own cadres, printing religious literature and organizing pilgrimage to the holy places.

Existence of a separate religious administration accelerated the process of religious revival in Tatarstan. Today there are more than 500 mosques and nearly 700 religious committees, (*mahalle*) registered under the Committee on Religious Affairs of Tatarstan. Apart from large number of medreses, the first religious university *Muhammadiya* was opened in Kazan. At the same time there are two distinguished medreses *Tenzile* and *Yıldız* working in the city of Naberejniye Chelny. However, in the building of the famous historical *Kul Şarîf* Mosque, symbol of the Kazan Khanate, there is a church today.¹⁰¹

On 29 November 1990 *Iman* Islamic Center was established. With its own publishing house, numerous printed works and four periodical journals: *Iman* (1991), *Vera* (in Russian, 1994), *Iman Nuri* (1993), *Yakın* (1994), the *Iman* Center has become one of the most industrious and effective religious organizations.¹⁰² From 1991 up to today the religious printing house of *Iman* (chief editor Venerulla Yarullin) has made significant headway in publication of religious books and pamphlets on Tatar and Russian languages. Beyond this, there are several religious periodicals published in Russian and Tatar: the journals *Din ve Magiyşet* and *İslam Nuri*, and the newspapers *Iman*, *İslam Mönberi* among others. Many medreses also have their own printing houses.

In order to progress the present religious establishments needs concrete state assistance. Unfortunately, today the religious societies contend with all of their problems unaided. The lack of the qualified, competent teachers and the low level of the clergy trained during the Soviet era is retarding the speed of Islamic revival. The shortage of clergy knowing Arabic results in a totally inadequate number of Muslim

educational establishments. Some of the *medreses* in Tatarstan lack elementary conditions to conduct education process. The central and local authorities close their eyes to these problems, justifying it by the fact that religion is constitutionally separated from the state.

On 21 June 1996, in Kazan the first political religious party “Muslims of Tatarstan” was established under the chairmanship of the Tatarstan’s Mufti Abdulla Galiullin. On 17 July 1996 this party was officially registered under the Ministry of Justice of Tatarstan.¹⁰³ The main objectives of the movement are concentrated upon such issues as; national revival and development of all the Muslim peoples and national minorities; preservation of their national languages, culture and traditions; defending the rights and interests of the Muslim people and other national minorities of the republic Tatarstan; strengthening traditional historical ties and collaboration between Muslims and Christians; making contribution to the adaptation of the proper national policy, answering the interests of the Muslim peoples together with other peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan.”¹⁰⁴

In the article concerning functions and activities of the party, it is stated: “For the accomplishment of the objective mentioned above the movement will: protect political, spiritual, economic and social interests of the Muslims of Tatarstan; unify the Muslims of Tatarstan for the sake of the civil agreement and national accord, material and moral prosperity of the society; seek proportional representation of the Muslims in the power structures at federal, republican and regional levels, in the organs of local administration and all spheres of social and political life; provide

assistance in the building new mosques, opening religious schools, train Muslim clergy, promote the spiritual development and religious enlightenment of Muslims.¹⁰⁵

The “Muslims of Tatarstan” party is the first registered political organization on religious lines in Tatarstan. The “Muslims of Tatarstan” party is not a branch of the all-Russian movement “Union of Muslims of Russia”, it is a completely independent political movement. One third of the governing board of the party consists of the leaders of the Tatar national movement. The program of the “Muslims of Tatarstan” party noted that the party “will participate in elections to all state organs”. Therefore, in case of elections it is very possible that the “Muslims of Tatarstan” party will form an electoral coalition with the *Ittifaq* party.

On the question about the purpose of creation of the “Muslims of Tatarstan” party, the chairman of the party Abdulla Galiullin stated: “In Tatarstan and many other Muslim republics some clerics agitate people not to get involved in politics. Arab clergymen, currently teaching Islam in Tatarstan, are of the same opinion. These people don’t know that to be out of politics in Russia means to be out of life. We, the Muslims of Russia are surrounded by a Christian environment. Unfortunately, our society does not live according to the law of Islam, therefore we must obey civil laws of the state. To make these laws a bit useful and valuable for the Muslim population, there must be representatives of the Muslims in the legislative organs of the state. This representation can be achieved only through active participation in the election campaigns. Therefore, the Muslims must have their own political parties and formations to participate in the elections. In Tatarstan, like everywhere in Russia, the process of politically organizing of the Muslims goes very slowly. In my opinion, the

Muslims of Russia and Tatarstan must be involved in politics to defend their rights through the law-making organs. We must make the laws of this state beneficial for the Muslims as well. For the Muslims living in the Arab countries and Turkey it is difficult to understand this situation. They think that after the collapse of the Soviet Union there is absolute religious freedom for the minorities in Russia. Today it is so, but tomorrow this freedom can be restrained. Therefore, now we must gain momentum and awaken all the Muslims.”¹⁰⁶

When studying the revival of Islam in Tatarstan, it is necessary to point out the significant role of the nationalist parties in this process. Nationalism is an important factor in maintaining the influence of Islam. For Tatars Islam is totally identified with the idea of nation. The power of national sentiment in Tatarstan emerged even before the religious rebirth. Tatar nationalism is one of the most significant nationalist-separatist movements of the Russian Federation.

Today ethnically based parties in Tatarstan apart from asserting ethnic independence from Russian domination, are very much concerned with religious revival. Among the nationalist parties and movements mentioning revival of Islam in their program documents there are *Ittifaq*, party, the *Milli Meclis* of Tatar People, and *Azatlq* Tatar Youth Movement.

The reason of such intensive nationalist manifestation is the danger of total assimilation of the Tatar nation. Tatarstan is strongly influenced and penetrated by Russian people and Russian culture. As a result, Kazan Tatars are deeply linguistically assimilated by the Russians. Approximately 60% of the young Tatar population are deeply russified thereby losing the national culture and language.¹⁰⁷ To the question

“Can you fluently speak your native language?” Only 49.2% of Tatars answered positively. Among the Tatar respondents 6.3% noticed that they couldn’t speak their native language at all.¹⁰⁸

Kazan Tatars have formed important “diaspora” colonies outside Tatarstan but these colonies have been deprived of national schools and publications. There has been a steady assimilation of the Tatars living outside the national territories by the local nationalities and by the Russians. According to the general census of 1989, the Tatars are in second place after the Jews on the intermarriage list; 42.2 per cent of Tatar women and 40.9 per cent of the Tatar men marry with peoples of different nationality.¹⁰⁹

To preserve the national and spiritual values of the Tatars living in Tatarstan and outside, it was decided to establish an organ for all Tatars. In February 1992, the all-Tatars Congress was held in Kazan. At this Congress, along with other resolutions, the decision to create a *Milli Meclis*, the national parliament of 7 million Tatars, living in Tatarstan and outside was adopted.¹¹⁰ The main basis of the political activity of the *Milli Meclis* is “the will of Tatar people, approved by the *Kurultay* (Congress), concerning such questions as the self-determination of the Tatars as a single, united nation, the status of the Tatar language, development of culture and religion, etc.” Despite its “informal” basis the *Milli Meclis* provides a fundamental political and national framework for the future Tatar generations. Both *Milli Meclis* and *Ittifaq* party have an extraterritorial authority.

One of the unique functions of the *Milli Meclis* is adopting the laws for the Tatar nation. The *Tatar Kanunu* (“The Tatar Canon”), adopted by the *Milli Meclis* is a

sort of catechism for the Tatars to survive in an alien environment, without losing national features. The *Tatar Canon* is divided into seven chapters dealing with numerous subjects from culture to ecology. The whole document is strongly penetrated by the spirit of Islam. At the beginning of the document it is written that "The true Tatar must consider Islam as his moral and spiritual basis. He (she) must fulfill the five requirements of Islam".¹¹¹

Another important document aiming the preservation of the Tatar nation, issued by the Milli Meclis is the "Family Codex". In the "Family Codex" the prerequisites of the formation of the Tatar family are described as follow: "Family life must be regulated according to the suras *Nur*, *Nisa*, and *Loqman* of the Koran." In the section concerning the methods of the formation of the Tatar family it is written: "The Tatar family is based on *nikah*. The procedures of *nikah* must be performed according to the ayats 23-24 of the sura *Nisa*, and ayat 2 of the sura *Nur* of the Koran."¹¹²

The facts stated above show that the Tatar nationalism and religion two closely interrelated concepts. It is necessary to notice that the nationalist parties in Tatarstan have changed their tactics since 1990. If in the past the idea of state independence was the question of concern of the nationalist movements, today preservation of the Tatars as a nation is on the agenda. Under the current "soft dictatorship" of the post-communist Tatar government and chauvinistic tendencies of the Central authorities of Moscow, the idea of an independent Tatarstan seems to be unrealizable. So, under these conditions the leaders of the Tatar nationalist movement has realized that for the moment it is more important to survive as a nation. The survival of the nation is possible only through the strengthening of Islam.

Although not religion-based, the main opposition party *Ittifaq* strongly supports a return to Islamic values. Today the *Ittifaq* party operates under the slogan : “Devlet Beysizligi Milletde, Millet Beysizligi Iman’da”, (“Independence of the state depends on its nation, independence of the nation depends on its faith, Iman”).

For the *Ittifaq* party Islam is a very important determinant of the Tatar national spirit and morality. One of the articles of the party program concerning its objectives reads: “We call for the rise and spreading of Islam, for the unification and cohesion of all the Muslim peoples of the Russian Federation”.¹¹³

According to Fevziye Bayramova, leader of the *Ittifaq* party, Islam is the focal point of the Tatar revival. When explaining the policy of the party, Fevziye Bayramova stated: “For the Tatars returning to the faith, to *Iman* , to the traditions of Islam is a matter of survival. The Tatar nation is very sick. The Soviet regime destroyed the traditional framework of the Muslim family, and the Tatars fell victim of the process of Russification and assimilation. Today more than 40% of Tatars are married to Russians. The children born from these families become Russified Tatars. Through the mixed families the worst qualities of the Russians such as alcoholism, robbery, sloth, degradation of moral values have passed to the Tatars. If the Russification continues in this speed, the Tatar nation will be on the verge of extinction by the next century. Islam is the only salvation for the Tatars. Koran prohibits intermarriage with the non-Muslims, it also prohibits the usage of alcohol drinks, and all other sins, *haram*. It means that the Tatars can survive as a nation only by returning to their origins, to their true religion. Islam is a religion of freedom and justice. Our mission is to explain the importance of Islam to the Tatar people.”¹¹⁴

The program of the Union of the Tatar Youth *Azatlık*, states that the political activities of the Union are directed towards the “recognition the role of Islam in the preservation of the culture of the Tatar nation”, and that the Union “desires to cooperate with all organizations whose aim is to save Islam and Tatar nation.”¹¹⁵ In one of the articles concerning the political course of the *Azatlık* it is written: “If one day a sovereign Tatar state, but without the Tatar language and Islamic religion, will be established, at the cost of disappearance of the historical traditions and best characteristics of the Tatar nation, if sovereignty implies this, there is no need for such a sovereignty.”¹¹⁶

The appeal to Islam is a characteristic of many political groups in Tatarstan. Even the moderate political parties of Tatarstan accept the importance of religion in the development of the Tatar nation. Thus, the “Committee of Sovereignty”, one of the social movements advocating sovereignty for Tatarstan, recognizes that Islam is the main basis of morality of the Tatar nation.¹¹⁷

There are also many other parties operating on a political scene of Tatarstan; the famous Tatar *Ictimagıy Üzek* (the “Tatar Socio-Political Center”) which has a strong popularity in Tatarstan, the *nomenclatura* party *Edinstvo i Progress*, the centrist party “Republican Party of Tatarstan”, branches of numerous Russian parties. It would be wrong to skip these parties over, just because they do not mention the concept of religion in their political programs. All parties in the Muslim republics, regardless to orientation, were formed to bring solutions to the problems, and each party has supporters among the Muslims as well.

The official relationship between religion and state in Tatarstan is outlined in Constitution of 1992 - religion and state are officially separate. Islam being historically a state religion of the Volga Bulgars and Kazan Khanate, today is separate from the state. Within this context, president Mintimir Shaimiyev has adopted moderate policies relative to Islam. Shaimiev's attitude towards religion summarized in the following words: "Granting a particular religion a status of state religion, would be discrimination towards the other religions in Tatarstan, so, the state policy of Tatarstan, is built on equal treatment of all religions and interests of all ethno-confessional groups. For example, together with Kurban Bayram we made Christmas an official holiday."¹¹⁸

The *Milli Meclis* of the Tatar People appealed to the authorities of the republic with the request to ban the selling of alcohol drinks during the holy month Ramazan.¹¹⁹ This petition was openly ignored by the authorities of Tatarstan. In contrast to Tatarstan, the President of the Ingush Republic Ruslan Aushev issued an official *Ukaz*, (Decree) prohibiting the sale of alcoholic drinks during the holy fast in Ramazan.¹²⁰

The separation of religion and the state is well used by state authorities to justify their passiveness and unconcern towards religion. By saying that religion is separated from the state, the state authorities simply wave religious matter aside, refusing to build new mosques, print religious books, or train religious cadres. Therefore, the Muslims of Russia are compelled to build mosques, open *medreses* and train clergy mostly by their own means. Despite the fact that most of the religious establishments live only on personal donations of the believers (*sadaka*), and have

serious material difficulties, all of them pay high taxes to the state budget. All the religious establishments, mosques and *medreses* are regular tax-payers and kept under the control of the state. Apparently considering these measures to be insufficient, the Tatarstan's *State Soviet* (Parliament) is now working on a law project to put tax even on *sadaka*, the main income of the religious institutions.¹²¹

Anxious about the independent existence of the Muslim societies, the central and local bureaucracy is most unwilling to grant too much freedom to the religious institutions. To take charge of religious affairs a Committee on Religious Affairs has been established under the Council of Ministers of Tatarstan. This Committee registers "standardizes" all the independent religious organizations and *mahalle*. Apart from creating bureaucratic obstacles, the Committee on Religious Affairs does not hesitate to meddle in the internal affairs of the religious organizations, provoking conflicts and deteriorating relations among the clergy. Thus this Committee has made several attempts to dismiss the head of the Religious Board of Tatarstan (*Diniya Nazareti*) Abdullah Hazret Galliullin by organizing alternative religious Congresses.¹²²

One of the common problems of the Muslim associations is the question of leadership. Since 1990 new spiritual administrations have come into being on the basis of each national autonomous unit. In Moscow, Saratov, Kazan, Ufa and Siberia, independent Spiritual Boards (*Diniya Nazareti*) have been established. But in some places the local religious committees, *mahalles*, though having their own Spiritual Board, are subject to the Spiritual Board of the neighboring region. Thus, the largest *mahalle* of Tüben Kama in Tatarstan does not recognize the independent Spiritual

Board of Tatarstan and submits directly to Ufa. Such organizational disarray depends on political intricacies in the republics.

The present Islamic establishments still remains weak, dependent on political leadership and abstain from introducing religion into politics. From one side the state organs impede the politicization of the Muslims, from another side the Arab missionaries (clergymen) agitate the Muslims to abstain from the politics. Unfortunately, many Muslim organizations are still exposed to such influence of these external factors.

In Bashkortostan the religious revival goes more slowly than in Tatarstan. Historically the Bashkirs have been less religious than the Tatars. Today the spiritual authorities of Bashkortostan utterly rely on the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims, which is headquartered in Ufa. The location of the Central Spiritual Board in Ufa, however, does not speed up the process of religious revival among the Bashkirs. If in Kazan there are more than one hundred mosques, in Ufa this number does not exceed four or five. This fact can be explained by general indifference of the Bashkirs towards religion. No one of the Bashkir political parties emphasizes the importance of Islamic revival. Only the Tatar Democratic Party *Idel-Ural*, created on 11 March 1991 in Bashkortostan, stresses the importance of religion in the national revival of the Tatars. In its platform, along with the democratic principles and the cultural development of the Tatars of Bashkortostan, the party supports the concept of confederation of the Volga-Ural republics.¹²³

On 17 January 1995 the Congress of the Muslims of Russia has been held in Ufa. Although the congress was conducted under the supervision of the Moscow

authorities, more than a thousand deputies from different regions of Russia participated in it.¹²⁴ The main subjects of discussions were the disunity among the religious Boards, and the current position of the head of the Central Spiritual Board, Talgat Tacetdin. The Congress has adopted several resolutions condemning the violence in Chechnya, demanding immediate withdrawal of the Russian army from Chechen territory, and initiation of the negotiation process. One of the decisions adopted by the Congress was to give shelter to the orphaned Chechen children in Bashkortostan until the stabilization of the situation in Chechnya.¹²⁵

Apart from religious establishments in the national republics, there are also many Muslim religious organization in the large cities and non-Muslim regions of the Russian federation. In Izhevsk, capital of the Udmurt Republic, a Muslim Society called *Iman* was established, in the city of Toliatti an "Islamic Socio-Political Center" was established. The "Islamic Cultural Center" in Moscow successfully serves the needs of the Muslim citizens of the capital.¹²⁶ In Moscow the Cathedral Mosque annually admit 600 new students to study Arabic and Koran. In 1994 the "High Islamic Spiritual College" was opened in Moscow, under the supervision of the teachers from Egypt and Turkey students from the different regions of Russian Federation obtain religious education there.¹²⁷

Some of the local political parties in the regions mention Islam in their programs. Thus the Tatar Democratic Party of the "Ural Republic", as the Yekaterinburg oblast calls itself, appreciate Islam as the main basis of the history and culture of the Tatar people, and supports efforts by the Muslim clergy in reviving the moral values of the Tatar people.¹²⁸

Today the Muslims of Russia undergo a process of general awakening. But the revival does not mean that all are converting to active participation. The values of Islam have not penetrated yet to the heart of each individual Muslim. Although firmly attached to their faith, only very small percentages of the Muslims live according to the principles of Islam. While many say that they are believers and participate in religious holidays and customs, far fewer actually participate in religious rituals such as daily prayers and regular mosque attendance. Thus, according to the survey, only 25 per cent of the urban Tatar population observe religious rites, pray and regularly visit mosques.¹²⁹ In other words, the fulfillment of the religious duties lags behind the feeling of identification with Islam.

3.2. The North Caucasus.

Islam is the main unifying factor of the Caucasus peoples. The spiritual kinship of the indigenous inhabitants of the Caucasus is consolidated by their common religion. The overwhelming majority of the native Caucasian peoples are Sunni Muslims. During the years of Soviet rule the attacks on patriarchal traditions and Islam and “harmful religious survivals” in the Caucasus were made more intensively than anywhere else. With *perestroika* the potential revival of Islam in Muslim territories and, particularly, in the North Caucasus achieved official recognition in the press and state agenda of Russia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the number of Muslim associations increased during 1991-92 from 870 to 4000 (most of them in the Northern Caucasus).¹³⁰

Islamic traditions in the Caucasus differ from these of other regions by their remarkable pluralism. While in Tatarstan and elsewhere there is one official *Muftiyat*

(Spiritual Board) in charge of religious affairs, in Chechnya, there are dozens of *Sufi* authorities, and almost each clan has its own spiritual leader. In the Caucasus the preservation of religion was sustained through the so-called “parallel Islam”; an extensive network of the Naqshbandi and Qadiri tariqats. Since the traditions and practices of “parallel Islam” are very strong in the Caucasus, national front movements and political parties in many Caucasus republics are strongly influenced by the *tariqats* and other religious bodies.

Moreover in the Caucasus certain traditional institutions such as the Council of Elders (*Sovet Stareyshin*) or *Aksakals* have authority and voice in the life of the nation. Almost all the Caucasus republics have their own National Congresses. Apart from this, many Caucasian nationalities have established popular front movements to defend their ethno-cultural interests.

The methods of political struggle has been different in the Muslims republics of Russia. While in the past the Tatar’s response to the Russian domination was in the form of cultural reformism and sophisticated political movements, the peoples of the Caucasus demonstrated resistance and unity around Islam through the *Jihad*.

One of the most promising political organizations promoting pan-Caucasian unity was the “Confederation of the Mountain Peoples.” The “Assembly of Mountain Peoples” was formed in 1990. The ultimate goal of the organization was the creation of the Caucasian Federal Republic. One year later on November 1991, in Sukhumi the Assembly was reorganized as the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, in which 16 Caucasus peoples were represented. One of the objectives of the Confederation was the establishment of independent government

structures among the nations of the North Caucasus. The national congresses of the nations, forming the assembly, have signed an agreement to support each other in case of danger.¹³¹

Surprisingly, the Confederation did not stress the importance of religion. Despite the fact that Islam has been the crucial element for the identity of the Mountaineers, the Confederation revealed its moderate attitude towards religion.¹³² The Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus could have been a unique forum of regional cooperation, but due to numerous factors it could not become effective.

In September 1992, the “Caucasian Round Table” gathered in Grozny with the purpose to create alternative Caucasian Confederation. In the opening speech, Chechen President Johar Dudayev stated that the purpose of the “round table” was to create a new confederation to unite all the mountain peoples to resist the pressure from the side of the empire. The representatives from eleven Caucasian republics participated in the “round table”. Representatives of the Ukrainian popular front movement *Rukh* and ex-president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia also attended the meeting.¹³³

These were the only attempts to unite the peoples of the Caucasus under the auspices of single organization. After these two events, the Caucasian republics abstained from the manifestations of pan-Caucasian sentiments. Dudayev persistently conducted the policy towards the creation of a common “*Caucasian Home*” (*Kavkazskiy Dom*), leading to the creation of the federative Caucasian state outside the Russian Federation. But none of the official governments of the Caucasian

republics replied to this idea.¹³⁴ Today each republic has its own separate way of development.

One of the definitely Muslim territories is Dagestan. Dagestan divided between some thirty nations. As in other divided republics, national unity is only possible around Islam. It is a fact that the only deputy in the Russian parliament from the "Union of Muslims of Russia" party has been elected from Dagestan.¹³⁵ The "Islamic Democratic Party" and the "Islamic Way Party" were first formed in Dagestan and Chechnya. General Islamic revival is clearly indicated in statistical figures: in Dagestan the number of mosques increased from 27 in 1988 to 5 000 in 1994.¹³⁶ Two main orders, the Naqshibandiya and Qadiriya are dominant in both republics. The socially conservative orthodox form of Islam is dominant in Dagestan. In terms of religious traditions, Dagestan is the most conservative region of Russia.

There are numerous political movements of the ethnic minorities living in the republics. Thus, the Avars, Lezgins, Kumyks, Nogays, Laks and Chechen have their own popular front movements. The various national movements of Dagestani peoples, actively oppose the republican center. But no political party in the republic is pushing for national independence. Thus, the socio-political movement *Birlik* of the Nogay people, striving for Nogay autonomy, appeals also to the resurgence of cultural and moral values.¹³⁷

Another active movement is the socio-political movement of the Kumyk people *Tenglik*. The organization was established on 19 November 1989 in Makhackala. Later, on 21 March 1992, the Congress of Kumyk people adopted decision about the creation of the Autonomous Kumyk Oblast (Region).¹³⁸ From the

very beginning the *Tenglik* party has been demanding federative re-structuring of Dagestan. In its program it stresses the problem of preserving of the cultural characteristics of the Turkic Kumyk people through the establishment of proper educational institutions. In 1993 at a scientific conference held in Makhachkala, the Kumyk linguists adopted decision concerning alphabet change, shifting to the Latin alphabet.¹³⁹

In Dagestan, Ingush Republic, and Kabardino-Balkariya, the religious holiday Ramazan and Kurban Bayram are official holidays. At a celebration of the birthday of the prophet Mohammed on July 28, 1996 in Makhachkala, capital of Dagestan, religious leaders from Dagestan and Ingushetia and humanitarian organizations from all over the North Caucasus appealed to the Russian president to stop the war.¹⁴⁰ Dagestanis have not yet raised the issue of independence but their participation is strategically important for the future of the Caucasus.

In the past in the Karachay-Cherkess republic there were few Karachay organizations such as *Djamagat*, "Confederation of the Repressed Peoples", and the "National Council of Karachay". The tough position of the Karachay organizations concerning the formation of a separate Karachay republic, has created tension between the Cossaks and Karachays in daily life. This confrontation lead to the crisis of power in 1992.¹⁴¹

The fact that in the vast spaces of Eurasia the Caucasus has a special but controversial status is undeniable. On one hand the Caucasus plays a role as a bridge between civilizations of Asia and Europe, on the other hand it still preserves the

complex archaic culture, tribal particularism, and societal self-organization that are capable of effectively resisting any outside influence.¹⁴²

It is difficult to say whether all of the North Caucasian autonomous republics have the same aspirations, but the only force that can unite the Caucasian nations is certainly Islam. The events in Chechnia created a strong sense of solidarity among the Caucasian peoples, in not their governments. All of the socio-political, nationalist and religious movements of the Russian Federation expressed solidarity and support for the Chechen Republic during the war. The Chechens have earned the admiration of their neighbors, and the North Caucasus peoples have mobilized in support of the Chechens and in opposition to the Russian policy.

Dissatisfaction with Moscow's policy on the Caucasus, distrust and tacit hatred of Russia caused by the Chechen war are growing among the peoples of the North Caucasus, which sooner or later will make themselves manifest.

Chapter IV

ALL-RUSSIAN MUSLIM POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

4.1. Islam Returns to the Russian Political Stage

Today Islam is returning to the political stage of Russia. The emergence of political Islam in Russia dated back to June 1990, when the Islamic Renaissance Party was created. Being an “all-union party” “Islamic Renaissance Party”, (*Islamskaya Partiya Vozrozhdeniya*) was very active in most of the Muslim areas of the former Soviet Union. It claimed to express the interests of all Muslims in the Soviet Union. The ultimate goal of IPV was the creation of Muslim fraction in the USSR Supreme Soviet, similar to that which existed in the Duma until 1917. At the early 1991 IPV became the popular party among the Muslims and had established numerous branches in many Central Asian Republics and the Caucasus.¹⁴³

The trend towards the unification along the Muslim and Turkic lines, has been continued by the creation of the “Assembly of the Peoples of East” on the Congress of the Peoples of the East.¹⁴⁴ The “Assembly of the Peoples of the East” consisted of numerous political parties and popular movements from all the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union. The Assembly was the first political organization build on democratic lines aiming close collaboration of all the Eastern peoples of the USSR. The Coordinating Council of the Assembly consisted of such prominent personalities as Oljas Suleymanov (writer), Almaz Estekov (Kazakhstan), Abdurahim Pulat (Uzbekistan), Fevziye Bayramova (Tatarsan), Refat Çubar (Crimea).¹⁴⁵

The main objective of the Assembly was to defend the rights of the Eastern peoples living in the USSR, promote their cultural development, recognize the right of self-determination, prevent national conflicts, etc. Among the numerous documents adopted on the First Congress were the resolutions supporting the Gagauz people, elections in Azerbaijan, aspirations for state sovereignty of the republic Bashkortostan. One of the interesting resolutions adopted on the Congress was the Resolution No.7 concerning creation of the national military units within the Military Forces of the USSR.¹⁴⁶ The Congress accused the writer Soljenitsyn for his abusing chauvinistic statements in address to the eastern peoples, and blamed the speaker of the Russian parliament Ruslan Khasbulatov for his incompetence and indifference towards the problems of the minority peoples.¹⁴⁷ The "Assembly of the Peoples of the East" was the first attempt to unite the eastern peoples under the auspices of a single political organization. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union this promising organization has been disbanded.

The Russian society treated Islamic Renaissance leniently but without enthusiasm. In the minds of the ordinary Russians Islam was associated with backwardness, fundamentalism and even terrorism. Today despite the intensive anti-Islamic propaganda in the Russian media, the number of religious establishments continues to increase.

The idea of the consolidation of separate Muslim communities into one single political force came to the agenda in 1995. On the eve of the general elections to the State Duma the new parties, with the primary goal to participate in elections as Muslim political parties "defending political, social, moral and economic rights of all

Muslims living in the Russian Federation", were established. Today there are two officially registered Muslim parties of all-union character, operating in Russia.

4.1. All-Russian Socio-Political Movement "The Union of Muslims of Russia"

The first party on religious lines, the "Union of Muslims of Russia", was set up on 31 May 1995 and officially registered as a political party in June 1995.¹⁴⁸ The Union describes itself as a secular party which does not support a fundamentalist program. The political aim of the "Union of Russian Muslims" is to obtain "equal proportional representation of the Muslim people in the federal organs and in all spheres of public and political life." The highest executive organ of the party is the Congress (conference). In its First Party Congress, held in Moscow from 1-3 September 1995, 250 delegates from 63 different regions of Russia took participation.¹⁴⁹ At the moment of establishment the Chairman of the party was Abdulvahit Niyazov, known in the political circles as a pro-Yeltsin figure. Now the chairman of the party is Nadir Hachilaev, the former karate champion and prominent businessman of Dagestan. While the leaders of Russia's Muslim republics are not in the movement's list, many have advisers in the union.¹⁵⁰

The "Union of Muslims of Russia" claims to be the direct successor of the pre-revolutionary "Union of Muslims", *Ittifaq-ı-Müslimin* which operated in Russia between 1905-1917 and had its own fraction in the State Duma.¹⁵¹ But, it is unlikely that the "Union of Muslims" is able to perform such a mission. The political demands of the "Union of Muslims of Russian" are very abstemious when compared to its predecessor. The major points of its political agenda address to the cultural and

economic issues such as extensive economic assistance to the Muslim businessmen, encouraging investments to the Muslim lands, prohibition of nuclear weapons recognition of the major Muslim religious days as official holidays, etc. ¹⁵²

In the preamble of its program reads that the "Union of Muslims of Russia" "will do everything in its power for the consolidation of all Russian Muslims for the common political and economic interests of Russia. " Further it continued : "the Union stands up for one united Russia, for the unity of all Russian Muslims, for the unity of the word and deed." ¹⁵³

The political demands of the "Union of Muslims of Russia" are expressed in very general statements such as "to seek the extensive political and economic rights for the Muslims living in the national republics and regions of the Russian Federation. To seek adoption of a state program of spiritual revival where the interests of Islam as the traditional faith for many peoples of Russia would be taken into account." ¹⁵⁴

The political slogans of the "Union of Muslims of Russia" are far from any radicalism. Only in its cultural program the party mentions the concept of cultural autonomy of national and religious communities living in non-Muslim regions of Russia. ¹⁵⁵

The political line of the "Union of Muslims of Russia" is build on the full cooperation with the Russian authorities. Since the "Union of Muslims of Russia" does not address to the important political and national issues, it is not expected to constitute any serious threat to political stability and territorial integrity of the Russian state. On the pages of its program the "Union of Muslims of Russia" by all means

reveals its proximity and loyalty to the Russian state and its governmental structures.

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From its activities it is seen that the movement prefers to collaborate with the power echelons and official leadership in the republics. One of the first decisions taken in the founding conference of the "Union of Muslims of Russia", was "that of all the existing (presidential) candidates, the most probable and best from the point of view of the "Union" of the Muslims of Russia is the current President ¹⁵⁷. The "Union" also actively supported the Tatar president M.Shaimiev during the presidential election in March 1996.¹⁵⁸

At the moment of its creation many political analysts thought that the "Union of Muslims of Russia" was formed exclusively with the aim to gain seats in the Russian Parliament -or, at least, to assist well-known Muslim politicians to win office, so they could represent the interest of Russia's Muslim minority more effectively. But the "Union"s initial activities showed the opposite. After the failure to receive enough support to be placed on the ballot in the December Parliamentary elections, the "Union of Muslims of Russia" appealed to its supporters to give their votes for the Chernomyrdin's Party *Our Home is Russia*.¹⁵⁹ In the recent Presidential elections the situation was similar. The "Union" rejected to support Aman Tuleyev, the only Muslim candidate in the recent Presidential elections, launched instead active propaganda campaign in support of Yeltsin's candidacy.¹⁶⁰ On its turn Yeltsin and his team created "favorable conditions" for the propaganda activities of the "Union of Muslims of Russia". These reciprocal activities raised serious doubts about the real intentions of the "Union". Many highly placed religious leaders have distanced

themselves from the “Union” - including Gabdulla Hazret Galiullin, mufti of Tatarstan, and Zamir Khairullin, mufti of the Central Religious Administration for European Russia and Siberia.¹⁶¹ In protest to the “Union”’s support for Yeltsin, Party's Secretary Mukatdas Bibarsov resigned from the organization.¹⁶²

The program of the party does not provide for a concrete way to achieve foreseen goals, therefore, the political line of the “Union” is a bit controversial. From one side it states that the “Union” is against the use of military force against the civil population. From another side it gives support to Yeltsin in the presidential elections. While all democratic forces and nationalist parties criticized Yeltsin and his prime-minister for the reactionary, hard-line policy toward Chechnya, the “Union” did not express any discomfort with regard to the fact that thousands of innocent Muslims have been killed during the military operations in Chechnya.

In spite of some unclear moments in its political platform, in practice, the “Union of Russian Muslims” is a very active and fast-growing organization. The number of its regional branches is on increase. The “Union of Muslims of Russia” has officially appointed its own experts and consultants, to various Parliamentary Commissions and Committees. Direct involvement in legislative structures, gives the “Union of Russian Muslims” the opportunity to participate in law-making procedures. After the prolonged efforts, the “Union” managed to gain one seat to the State Duma. On 8 December 1996 the union’s chairman Nadir Hachilaev was elected a deputy to State Duma from Dagestan.¹⁶³ Later the spokesman for the Union has announced the plans to organize a Muslim deputies’ group in the State Duma. Most of the 26 Muslim deputies currently serving in the Duma belong to the pro-government

Our Home is Russia movement. Even if all of them joined the new group, it would lack the 35 needed to form an officially registered fraction.¹⁶⁴ Moreover the proposal on the formation of parliamentary group was opposed by the former deputy chairman of the upper house of the parliament Duma deputy Ramazan Abdulatipov.¹⁶⁵

The leader of the "Union of Russian Muslims" Nadir Hachilaev relying on the Dagestan's branch of the "Union" has conducted successful shuttle diplomacy between the Caucasian republics. To start peace negotiation process in Chechnya, Nadir Hachilaev and the Ingush president Ruslan Aushev have arranged meetings between Lebed and Chechen leaders Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Aslan Maskhadov.¹⁶⁶ The "Union" also has been taking active participation during the Chechnya war as well. Thus Nadir Hachilayev, the chairman of the Union managed to release many Russian hostages from the hands of the Chechen troops. It is interesting that the released hostages were not the civil people, but the soldiers of OMON.¹⁶⁷

On March 1, 1996 in the city of Derbent the Union of Russian Muslims held a regional conference on the problem of the Russian-Azerbaijani border line, which divides 800 000 Lezgin people into the territories of two states. In this conference representatives of the South Dagestan delegated full authorities to the Union of Russian Muslims to negotiate on the name of the Lezgin people about the legal status of the present borders with the Russian and Azerbaijani authorities.¹⁶⁸ Today Moscow uses the problem of the Lezgin people and a "desire of the Lezgin people living in Azerbaijan to unite with its kinfolk in Russia" as a trump card to push Azerbaijan towards closer economic ties with Russia. Taking into account the high

level of religiosity of the Lezgin people it seems that the Russian government found a good mediator for its state policies in the person of the “Union of Muslims of Russia”.

The results of the “Union”’s activities are patchy. The “Union of Muslims of Russia” faces many problems one of which is the question of leadership. Up to now dubious persons with inappropriate background ruled the party. Some uncertain points concerning the real aim of formation of the Muslim parties also leave room for various speculations. One of the most striking details is that almost all the Muslim parties, carrying all-union character, have been established in Moscow.

4.2.All-Russian Muslim Socio-Political Movement Nur.

Another Muslim political party that stands on the religious platform is *Nur*, the all-Russian Muslim Socio-Political Movement. *Nur* was established on June 16, 1995.¹⁶⁹ It is the second officially registered Muslim political organization which has the legal right to participate in elections. In general, political platform of the *Nur* movement is similar to that of the Union of Russian Muslims. Within its general political program *Nur* has also legislative, military, economic, educational, cultural ethical and ecological sub-programs. Besides the local branches, *Nur* has under its premises the “Organization of Muslim Women and Youth”, which is responsible for cultural and educational programs and deals with such issues as health care, sports, problems related with birth rate and motherhood. When compared to the Union of Russian Muslims, *Nur* is a rapidly-growing organization; as today it has already established more than 60 regional branches in the Republics. The Board of

Chairmanship of the Party is composed of 13 people, who are delegates from the various regions of Russia. The highest consultative organ of *Nur* is the "Council of Elders" (*Sovet Stareyshin*), as a symbol of wisdom and Muslim traditions.¹⁷⁰ In the recent elections to the State Duma, *Nur* gained 0.69 % votes and took the 22nd place among the 47 registered political parties which have participated and in the election in Russia..¹⁷¹ For the newly-established religious party of the confessional minority it is not so bad. The chairman of the party is Vafa Yarullin, a young religious figure, (not yet well known in the Russian and local political circles), was elected after the resignation of the party's former chairman Ahmed Yahin, who was accused for his assistance to a Liberal Democratic Party's Deputy.¹⁷² On the question what is the difference between the *Nur* movement and the "Union of the Muslims of Russia" Vafa Yarullin stated: "the "Union of the Muslims of Russia" is a civil society. It works as a branch of the Islamic Cultural Center in Moscow. Our movement is a purely political organization, to defend the rights of the Muslims properly we engage in politics."¹⁷³

In the Russian presidential elections, contrary to the Union of Russian Muslim Party, *Nur* supported the candidacy of the liberal reformist Grigoriy Yavlinsky.¹⁷⁴ In the political program of the Party it is said that *Nur* does not violate state interests of the Russian Federation. It is loyal to the state mechanisms of the Russian Federation except for, the violations of human right , genocide and any state policy that provokes national tension and oppression of ethnic minorities. The program contains specific measures concerning religious education, business, revival of cultural traditions, creation of special funds for the Muslim students. One important

point in the program of *Nur* is related to the use of military force in the settlement of the regional and national conflicts.¹⁷⁵ In the light of this article, *Nur* protested the military involvement of the Russian forces in Chechnya.¹⁷⁶ *Nur* supports the idea of the establishment of the organized courses for the pre-conscription trainees in the places of the compact residence of the Muslim population. It also supports creation of exclusively Muslim military units within the Russian army employed only by the Muslim personnel, so that the Muslim soldiers will be enhanced to fulfill their religious duties.¹⁷⁷

In general the program of *Nur* is build along democratic lines. Though claiming of being of all-union character, the *Nur* movement supports territorial autonomy of the Muslim republics. The movement opposed the federal government's intention to force republics to make their legislation conform to federal law. The deputy-chairman Hacı-Murat İbrahimbeyli said that the republican authorities know better how to express local traditions in legislation, while federal laws, including the Constitution, fail to reflect those traditions.¹⁷⁸

One of the advantages of the *Nur* movement is that it has also sympathizers from the ethnically-based parties and nationalist movements in the national republics. Religion has worth in the eyes of the nationalist parties, because it helps to bind people together and gives them a feeling of solidarity. In the elections to the State Duma, *Nur* proposed approximately hundred candidates from the different districts of Russia. Two active members of the national movement of Tatarstan, writer Aydar Halim and singer Vafire Gizatullina were also proposed as candidates to the State Duma from the *Nur* Party.¹⁷⁹ Although Tatar nationalist party *İttifaq* boycotted the

election to the State Duma on the ground that "the highest legislative organ of the oppressor state had done nothing for the improving the life of the Tatar people ", and appealed to the Tatar people not to participate in the elections, for those who wanted to participate in the suffrage, *Ittifaq* proposed to support the *Nur* party.¹⁸⁰ In the interview to the newspaper *Altın Urda*, singer Vafire Gizatullina, the candidate from the *Nur* Party, said that some nationalists accuse them for treason against the idea of independence of Tatarstan. "For us independence of Tatarstan has always been the primary goal, but today under the current circumstances it is hardly possible, so we decided to struggle for the welfare of the Tatar people from the federal power echelons", said Vafire Gizatullina in the interview.¹⁸¹

In 1996, after the presidential elections the position *Nur* began to deteriorate from its previous democratic line. To protect the Muslim community of Russia from the unpredictable consequences of the Lebed-Yeltsin alliance, the "Nur movement became a member of the most chauvinistic Russian organization *Russkiy Sobor*."¹⁸² Under the pretext that Lebed saved Russia from the imminent danger of the new-coming Communists, the *Nur* movement start looking for opportunity to cooperate with him. It sounds strange but today the *Nur* movement is a member of the chauvinistic organizations backing Lebed.

In May 1996, "The Union of Muslims of Russia" and the *Nur* party decided to unite their power in a single organization to be named the "Union of Muslims of Russia." The Unification Agreement was signed in the capital of Dagestan Makhachkala.¹⁸³ Later, however for the uncertain reasons, two parties have split again.

On April 13 1996, the Imam of the Saratov city mosque Mukaddes Bibarsov a bright religious leader, and former General Secretary of the "Union of Muslims of Russia", formed a new independent Muslim party named "Muslims of Russia".¹⁸⁴ Although Bibarsov has good organizational skills and considered one of three most respected imams in Russia, it is hardly possible that he could manage to coordinate the political activities of the Muslims of Russia staying in Saratov.

By the end of 1996, Duma deputy Ramazan Abdulatipov announced the plans about the establishments of a Coordinating Council of Russia's Muslim organizations. He said that the council will coordinate the activities of about two dozens Russian Muslim organizations. He himself will head the new council.¹⁸⁵

As it is seen from the facts above the new Muslim political organizations emerge and disappear like mushrooms, making it difficult to follow up the course of events. Nevertheless all these developments show that the political culture of the Muslims of Russia is high enough to form political associations and seek parliamentary representation. One important question rises behind all these endeavors - how great is the power of these Muslim organizations to influence the Muslim electorate just through the "confessional lines"?

Although officially Islam returned to the masses, Muslim population is deeply integrated into the Russian society. Despite the fact that Islam remains the main unifying bond between various Muslim nations in Russia, it is doubtful that there is a strong sense of belonging to one *Umma*. Russia is a huge territory , and under the current political circumstances it is early to place high hopes on the prospective role of Muslim representation in the Russian state power structures.

Russia, constantly playing “Islamic card” and exploiting the fear of Islam to justify its active presence in the Central Asian republics, will hardly resign itself with the fact that the politicized Islam gains a basis ultimately in the Russian Federation itself. Fear of Pan-Islamism has a long history in Russia. Taking into account the fact that today there are 20 million of non-slavic inhabitants still living in Russia, Yeltsin and his team spend enormous efforts and money to prevent the Russian Federation from further disintegration and collapse.

For the time being nationalist movements in the autonomous republics welcome aspirations of the Russian Muslim parties for their contributions to the cultural and spiritual revival of the Muslims. But one fact raises doubts about the real nature of these Muslim organizations, it is the active interest of the Russian authorities in their growth and development. To create the illusion of economic and administrative parity of the Muslim minorities with the dominant Russians, the Russian government doesn’t hesitate to use dirty tricks and political maneuvers. The pro-governmental Muslim movements with unclear objectives may be one of these numerous tricks, because for Russia it is better to see its Turko-Muslim subjects “represented” in its governmental power structures, than to let them secede.

CONCLUSION

Since 1990 the Muslim republics in Russia have experienced ethnic and religious revival. High interest towards the religion among the population lead to the significant increase in the number of the mosques, religious establishments, political parties along the religious lines. All those variables that can lead to the consolidation of different Muslim communities are present in the Muslim republics today. But despite this, the republics did not show any serious inclinations to mobilize politically on religious lines. So, what are those obstacles that hamper the unification of the Muslims of Russia? There are three main reasons of the lack of sense of the common Muslim identity among the Muslims of Russia.

One of the factors that had the most profound effect on the Muslim communities of Russia is the so-called Soviet heritage. The common feature of this heritage is the artificially created administrative unit-republic and its governing apparatus. The moderate *status quo* regimes accompanied by the political indifference and apathy of the peoples is firmly installed in the republics. Post-communist governments in the Muslim republics have no interest in the strengthening of political Islam. They put up with the revival of Islamic traditions on the casual level, never allowing Islam and other popular ideologies to penetrate into the high politics. The ruling elite in the Muslim republics harshly resist the emergence of any political groupings that may challenge their status.

On unofficial level there is a strong feeling of solidarity among the Muslim political parties in the republics. The popular movements, nationalist parties, religious establishments are in close ties with each other. But the official governments lack such enthusiasm. The present leadership of the Muslim republics - the old republican communist parties - are anti-Islamic by training and political instinct. Five years of the post-independence experience showed, that the leaders in the Muslim republics have no intention to form political alliance and manifest all-Muslim solidarity. Under these circumstances it necessary to confess that the Muslim political union can hardly be realized under the present leadership in the Muslim republics. The official governments in the national republics are very reluctant to support each other fearing the reaction of Moscow. Some scholars correctly noticed that the Muslim regions were the most pro-centrist of any group of republics in the former USSR.¹⁸⁶

The lack of appropriate leadership capable to bring the Muslims together is one of the urgent problems of the Muslim community of Russia. Traditionally the Muslim clergy prefer to abstain from politics. Almost all Muslim religious leaders within Russia support the idea of united Muslim community in Russia, but few of them consider it appropriate to achieve the unity by political means. The complete isolation of religious figures from politics restrict their impact on Muslims.

In both the tsarist and Soviet periods, the state tried its best to be the only patron of Islamic establishments through the official Spiritual Boards. Today the republican leadership still wants to see the main religious figures appointed rather than elected. In some of the Muslim organizations, (especially in Moscow, Kazan, Ufa) unknown, inexperienced persons were appointed by the state organs to the main

posts of the religious administration. It cannot be said that these people work hard on the unification of separate Muslim communities. For the central organs it is better to see the Muslim organizations disbanded and isolated from each other.

The Soviet legacy of social problems, alcoholism, moral degradation, crime and corruption is a common phenomenon in all of the republics. It is hardly complimentary to the Tatar national feelings, if not blatantly outrageous to it, that Tatarstan state liqueur industry started producing a new sort of vodka named *Altın Urda* and *Süyübike*.¹⁸⁷

Another important factor that overpowers the unification of Muslims is the prevailing ethnic allegiance in the Muslim republics of Russia. During the Soviet period everything was done to break up Muslim *umma* and create artificial Muslim nations separated from each other and deprived of their religion. Today the ordinary Muslim in the national republics associates himself with the nationality of his ethnic republic. For him his national republic is the only bastion of the traditional culture, the notion of universal abstract *Umma*, is beyond his perception.

The ideal of adhering to all-embracing, single umbrella of a Turkic or Muslim nation existed among the pre-revolutionary Muslims, albeit with a strong adherence to other "sub" identities. Today, it is not easy to talk about such an affiliation. In the past, the Muslim peoples of Russia had an equal status within the empire, equal demands and one common opponent - imperial Russia. Today the situation is much more different. Today the Muslims of Russia directed their energies toward solving their local problems. Consolidation of each national community in its homeland overpowers the sense of supranational consciousness. Many strong

Muslim states such as Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan (which were in the past under the common name of Turkestan) are independent states today. Those who are inside the Russian Federation have to cope both with the local and federal restraints.

Islam in the Muslim republics today is very different from what it was before the revolution. Therefore, the political actions of the modern Muslims must be adjusted to the changing conditions of life. Before the Revolution the Muslims of Russia were busy with such problems as cultural, territorial autonomy, national education etc, while today different local political parties of non-religious character deal with these problems. If the question of state autonomy was raised by the Tatars on the First All-Russian Muslim Congress in 1917, today such issues are raised by the national-patriotic political movements, and considered on the Parliamentary level. Thus the Declaration on Sovereignty was adopted on the session of the Supreme Soviet of Tatarstan in 1990.

No doubt, the political unification of the Muslims of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Caucasus would open a new page in the history of the Muslims of Russia. To form an effective association the Muslims of Russia first of all must have strong political consciousness and will to resist pressure from Moscow. Intensive national and religious renaissance is certainly not welcomed by the Russian authorities. Any attempt of the Muslims to unite on political lines is considered by Moscow as a threat to its territorial integrity. The Russian leadership knows that the future shape of Russian frontiers will depend on the political aspirations of its Muslim subjects. Therefore, being aware of the potential danger of such alliance, the Russian

authorities will do everything to prevent the real consolidation of its Muslim subjects.

Despite all these negative elements obstructing political development of the Muslims of Russia, there is one peculiar factor importance of which is undeniable. This factor is a general Islamic boom that the national republics undergo today. Although the administrative partition of the Muslim community of Russia has been achieved, the bureaucratic methods of eradicating Islam during the Soviet period, had proved inefficient. Atheism failed to win the hearts of the Muslims of Russia. Today the Muslims of Russia are experiencing religious re-birth, approaching genuine Islamic traditions. The awareness of Islamic heritage is growing in all Muslim regions, and each Muslim republic acquaints with Islam all over again. It is necessary to point out that this religious revival among the Muslims of Russia is only on its initial stage. This stage is the stage of the profound comprehension and re-evaluation of the values of Islam. A rediscovery of Islamic roots is under way in all the Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. In some republics this process goes rapidly, in the others slowly, but phenomenon of the returning to the traditional, cultural and religious roots is present in all the Muslim republics. This gradually accumulated but restrained political potential will sooner or later reveal itself forcing the Muslims of Russia to make step further. Today is the stage of regaining of lost values, the stage of common actions will come next.

The emergence of the first Muslim political parties on religious lines such as *Nur* and the “Union of Muslims of Russia” is the first sign of this initial process of the political revival. Though the creation of these two parties created various

speculations in the political circles of Russia and national republics, the presence of the Muslim parties on the political scene of Russia is already a serious achievement in the process of political awakening of the Muslims of Russia. What the Muslim political parties such as the “Union of the Muslims of Russia” and *Nur* do today, is a good indicator of the political maturity of the Muslims of Russia. There can be little doubt that eventually the Muslim political organizations will convince the Muslim nations of advantages of cooperation. The growing awareness of the necessity to mobilize on political lines is well reflected in the words of a young Tatar Muslim intellectual:

There is need for unity of all the Muslims of Russia. This unity must be spiritual and ideological based on the genuine principles of Islam. All types of unity based on the temporary earthy benefits; material, political and others would distort the real Islamic values and real unity. The true union of the Muslims can be done only on the basis of Koran and holy principles of the prophet Mohammed.¹⁸⁸

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